



Hundreds sign petitions to save borough sports venues

LEISURE CENTRE IS UNDER THREAT

Report by Clare Butler

HUNDREDS have hit out at proposals to close three leisure centres across Dudley borough to be replaced by two new centres – as it looks as if Halesowen could be the biggest loser.

The council is planning to build new centres next to the bypass in Lye and on Dudley's Flood Street car park, meaning Halesowen would be the town losing a leisure centre.

More than 1,000 signatures have already been gathered by the Save Our Leisure Centres group led by former councillor Tracy Wood.

Council chiefs want to close Dudley's three main leisure centres – at Wellington Road in Dudley, Cornbow Road in Halesowen and Stourbridge's Crystal Leisure Centre – and replace them with two new facilities in a bid to save the cash-strapped council £1.7 million.

Councillor Karen Shakespeare, who represents the Halesowen North ward, said: "I understand that these sites need upgrading but why couldn't the council choose somewhere like Mucklow Hill for a leisure centre to be placed?"

"The big issues are location and accessibility. Halesowen has already lost some key places, like the courts and the police station, and now the proposed nearest leisure centre will be Lye. It is sad when we work really hard to get foot-fall into the town too."

"Lye is not the easiest of places to get too and the traffic getting into Stourbridge is always bad."

Campaigner

About 600 people have signed an e-petition, while more than 800 have signed the paper version. Campaigner Mrs Wood said: "We really want to gain 10,000 names to gain a full debate with the council on this issue. This is a huge thing that is affecting so many people."

Dudley Council regeneration boss Khurshid Ahmed says Dudley's Flood Street car park and vacant land off the Lye bypass had both been earmarked for the possible new builds. Council cabinet members will be discussing the issue on Wednesday, December 14.

John Brett, whose Dudley Olympics group encourages people with learning difficulties to participate in sport, said: "If Halesowen leisure centre was to close then it would make a terrible difference. We have up to 50 disabled people who use the facility on a Monday night and if it is taken away from them then we would need to look for an alternative venue. This would be devastating."

FAREWELL TO 'STRONG AND FEISTY' NELL, AGED 107



Miss Ellen 'Nell' Cook pictured on her 107th birthday in Halesowen earlier this year, holding up her congratulations card from the Queen

ONE of Halesowen's oldest residents, who had lived through both world wars, has died at the age of 107.

Miss Ellen 'Nell' Cook died at Gower Gardens Care Home in Halesowen on November 29. Her family paid tribute to a 'wonderful' lady who was family orientated.

Born in the Digbeth district of Birmingham on March 26, 1909, she grew up in a back-to-back house in Moseley Street with a shop in the front and lived with her mother, father, two brothers and three sisters.

Nell's niece Dianne Hall, 69, from Hale-

sowen, said Miss Cook outlived all her siblings. She never married but took pride in her family which also included two nieces, two great-nephews, one great-great niece and one great-great-nephew.

"Nell used to class herself as an 'unclaimed treasure', said Dianne. "She put her longevity down to two spoonfuls of sugar in her tea and plenty of salt on her food – they tell us that's bad for us nowadays."

"We are very sad about her death but are relieved she passed away peacefully in her sleep."

"She loved life and lived a full life too. She was a wonderful lady who was very close to us all. She was extremely strong and feisty."

Her funeral will be held at St Margaret's Church, in Hasbury, on December 16, at 1pm.

Miss Cook, who had lived in Halesowen for 25 years, left school when aged 12 and had various jobs including working at the Austin car plant during the Second World War.

She was also a keen knitter who made garments for the charity Mary Stevens Hospice in Stourbridge.

INDUSTRY

More than 20 jobs axed at training centre

MORE than 20 workers in Tipton are set to lose their jobs as engineering group Doosan Babcock cuts 500 jobs across the UK.

A total of 25 jobs will be axed at the company's training centre at Birmingham New Road, where apprentice welders are taught.

The company employs around 3,800 at its sites across the UK.

The bulk of the positions affected are in management, back-office support and at the factory marked for closure in Renfrew, Scotland.

COURT

Three deny plot to murder man

THREE people have denied conspiring to murder a man who was found seriously injured in a Langley street.

Nazim Khan, also known as Manvir Singh, aged 21, of no fixed address, 20-year-old Zaqir Islaam from Lime Road, Wednesbury and Balbir Kaur, 42, of Alfred Gun House, Oldbury, deny conspiring with others to murder Samson Masih, 36, on October 12. The three appeared at Wolverhampton Crown Court on Tuesday, where they are due to stand trial next May.

FOOTBALL

Glassboys drawn against Wycombe

STOURBRIDGE FC have been drawn against league side Wycombe Wanderers in the FA Cup third round.

The Glassboys still have to get past League One Northampton Town in the second round after Sunday's game was postponed due to a frozen pitch.

But if they win the game at the War Memorial Athletic Ground on Tuesday, they will face Wycombe on January 7 at Adams Park, on the outskirts of High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire.

Wycombe are seventh in League Two, three leagues above the Glassboys.

● Match on ice – see pages 2 and 40

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KICK-OFF FOR COLLEGE PITCH



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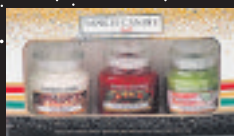
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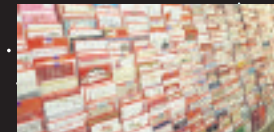


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Glassboys' FA Cup dream is put on ice



The frozen pitch on Sunday

STOURBRIDGE Football Club fans had their FA Cup dream put on ice as the clash with Northampton was postponed due to part of the War Memorial Athletic Ground pitch being frozen.

The rearranged tie will take place on Tuesday and the reward for victory would be a trip south to face Wycombe Wanderers after Glassboys went into the draw for the third round (see front page) for the first time.

Sunday's game was called off by the referee less than two hours before kick-off. Many home supporters had already travelled to the ground, as had away fans who were making a 140-mile round trip from the East Midlands for the second round tie.

Glassboys fan Vince Del Vecchio, aged 57, who lives near the ground and attends games with his wife Helen, said: "I'm very disappointed - we've played in much worse weather than this. They've cleared snow off the pitch before and we've still been able to play."

"It's the away fans I feel more sorry for because a lot of them were already making their way to the ground."

Mike Harrison from Bewdley said he believed more could have been done to ensure the pitch was match ready. "They could have put a sheet on the ground," he said. But Cobblers fan Tom White, 62, said: "These things can't be helped. It's just a pity they couldn't let us know sooner. Maybe they expected the pitch to thaw out in time."

Chairman Andy Pountney said: "Everyone is a little bit disappointed because we had all been looking forward to the game and we were ready to play."

● Sport - page 40

Drink-driver facing jail for order breach

A DRINK-DRIVER who was handed a five-year road ban is facing jail after being found slumped and intoxicated in his car.

Paul Tibbetts, aged 65, who admitted breaching a suspended sentence for a previous drink-driving offence, had parked at Tesco in Halesowen at around 8pm on October 13 when he was found with a bottle of red wine in the passenger seat.

When breathalysed he was almost twice the limit. He had 64mg alcohol in 100ml of breath. The legal limit is 35mg.

Tibbetts, of Hereford Rise, Halesowen, was convicted on October 28, but his sentence was deferred. He will now learn his fate on January 9 after the probation service provide reports.

Prosecutor Mr Edward Salisbury told Wolverhampton Crown Court: "He was sentenced to nine months in prison, suspended for 12 months on January 15 this year for drink-driving, and was disqualified from driving for five years."

"He has a number of drink-driving matters on his record. Once again he was found to be over the limit."

"He was seen by members of the public driving on the wrong side of the road, clipping the kerb. He pulled into the Tesco store and two police officers were alerted."

Insurance

"There was a bottle of red wine on the passenger seat and he was clearly in drink. He told police he was using a pool car which he had taken from an organisation he worked for. He also told them he was disqualified."

Tibbetts pleaded guilty to driving with excess alcohol, driving while disqualified, driving without insurance, taking a vehicle without consent and breaching a suspended sentence order.

Defence barrister Mr Simon Warlock told Judge Michael Challinor: "He went to see a probation officer and she said that she would prepare a report. It would be beneficial to him for you to see one. He is fully aware of the consequences of breaching a suspended sentence. He has had a tough time."

Judge Challinor told Tibbetts that he should expect a prison sentence.

Santas bring cash ho, ho, home



Phil and Mandy Udall, from Wordsley, took part in the Santa Run in aid of Beacon Centre and the RNIB

MORE than 130 sprinting Santas joined in a charity run as fundraisers donned Father Christmas suits and white beards to help raise money for the Sedgley-based Beacon Centre and RNIB.

Even pets joined in the festive fun at West Park in Wolverhampton, including a Shih Tzu named Oscar dressed in an elf costume.

The Santas could choose between a one mile and a 5km route, which was the equivalent of one and three loops of the park respectively.

After a warm-up in front of the bandstand, the run was started by Mayor of Wolverhampton Councillor Barry Findlay who told the fundraisers: "You're all superheroes."

Administrator Sue Crinnian, 52, from Wednesbury, a Halesowen Running Club member, said: "It's a great way to come together to raise some money for a good cause."

IT worker Mike Turner, 40, and Nicola Piggott, 45, both from Lower Gornal, had both taken

part in a similar fundraiser before. Nicola said: "It makes you feel Christmas and you feel good to be supporting a charity."

For Mandy Udall, 47, of Wordsley, who was running with husband Phil, 50, said: "My mother Ann Smith has a vision impairment so we wanted to support the charity."

Chief executive of Beacon Centre, Arwyn Jones, said it was the first time the charity had organised a Santa run and hoped to raise over £1,000.

Online casino company is recruiting more staff

ONLINE casino games developer Intouch is aiming to double in size over the next two years, with a major boost in jobs at its headquarters in Halesowen.

Intouch Games is a major part of Birmingham's thriving tech industry and has enjoyed a bumper year, developing online and mobile casino games, which has seen a 228 per cent rise in its UK employees over the past 18 months.

The company, owner of the mFortune and PocketWin casino brands, attributes its success to the "highly collaborative nature" of its teams.

"mFortune's journey is inspiring," said Sumit Lakhina, marketing manager at mFortune. "It's amazing to see how the company has emerged to be one of the leading online gaming companies in such a short period."

After being named by The London Stock Exchange Group as one of the 1,000 companies to inspire Britain last year, Intouch Games is starting 2017 with a drive to expand the 200-strong team based at Fountain House in Halesowen.

"We are expecting to double in size again in the next 24 months, and the opportunities are endless," explained Harriet Grant, HR manager at mFortune.

"From computer programming and graphic design, to marketing and customer service, we're looking for people who are not only great at what they do, but dynamic and enthusiastic."

"We want people with bags of initiative to join us on this exciting journey."

Beer festival £12k charities boost

MEMBERS of Dudley and South Staffordshire branch of Camra (the Campaign for Real Ale) voted Kinver Brewery's 7.5 per cent strength ale Over the Edge as beer of the festival, at the recent three-day Dudley Winter Ales Festival in Dudley Town Hall.

Sponsored by Holden's Brewery, the festival had been rescued after supporters rallied around.

The 31st annual fair raised £12,076 for the Blind Veterans' Association and the Mayor of Dudley's charities.

The opening night also saw the judging of West Midland Camra's old ales and strong milds competition which was won by Dark Ruby Mild - six per cent - from Sedgley's Sarah Hughes Brewery at the Beacon Hotel pub.

Young entertainers in theatre showcase

A YOUTH theatre group's Christmas showcase will be held this weekend. Halesowen Youth Theatre will perform on Saturday at Shenstone Theatre at Halesowen Library at 7pm. Tickets £10. For details email halesowenyouththeatre@outlook.com or call 07713 822499.

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Hippodrome rescue deal for theatre is secured

DUDLEY Hippodrome was in now in the hands of campaigners who saved it, after a deal to hand over the keys was finally sealed with Dudley Council.

Work to transform the Castle Hill theatre – once known as the ‘Showplace of the West Midlands’ –into a modern venue for the whole Black Country now gets under way.

The campaigners, who saved Hippodrome from plans to demolish it to create a public open space, are now working to open the building as a theatre for the first time in half a century.

Now a lease with Dudley Council has been signed off, preparations to refurbish the building will start with architects expected to be brought in

It marks an extraordinary achievement for members of the Black Country Hippodrome group.

Now they face need to raise around £5 million to make the dream a reality.

The building has not been used as a theatre since the 1960s. In its heyday it hosted such stars as Laurel and Hardy, Bob Hope, Gracie Fields, George Formby, Ken Dodd and Bob Monkhouse. It’s last use as a venue was as a bingo hall.

Steve Daniels, from Black Country Hippodrome, who led negotiations with council bosses, said he was delighted the deal had been finalised.

He said: “We are thrilled to sign the lease and can now move forward. It has been a long slog and we now need people to come out in force.”

Dedicated foster carers thanked

A FESTIVE celebration took place to acknowledge the hard work of foster carers across Dudley borough.

The event at Brierley Hill Civic Hall last Wednesday was an opportunity for the foster carers of Dudley to come together to meet each other and the fostering team at Dudley Council.

The team thanked foster carers for their continued support, the valuable work that they do and recognised their commitment to children.

Mayor of Dudley, Councillor Mohammad Hanif, personally thanked foster carers. He said: “The work that our foster carers do for our children in care is invaluable.”

For more information on fostering in Dudley visit www.dudley.gov.uk or call (01384) 815833.

Bully will sign books at Merry Hill

WOLVES legend Steve Bull will be visiting Merry Hill shopping centre to sign copies of his book Bully – Forever Wolves. He will be on the lower mall near Debenhams on December 18 between noon and 4pm.



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Pervert in prison for trying to lure girls



Shawn Jones – sent to prison

A PERVERT who tried to lure school-girls into the back of his car has been jailed for four and half years.

Shawn Jones has been found guilty by a jury of four charges of attempted abduction with intent to commit a sexual offence.

The 45-year-old from Norwood Road, Brierley Hill, had targeted two girls on two separate occasions while they were carrying out paper rounds and struck again after being arrested and bailed.

On January 15, 2015, Jones told a 14-year-old girl in the Kates Hill area she was beautiful before offering to

drive her around in his BMW. He made a similar offer when he pulled up next to a 12-year-old girl in Cradley, on April 14 that year.

Jones then approached two girls, aged 13 and 14, as they sat in the back of a car outside the KFC at Merry Hill shopping centre.

As he was sentenced, Wolverhampton Crown Court heard the offences had had a serious impact on all four victims. Prosecutor Glyn Samuel said both the girls involved in the KFC incident had since required counselling and felt anxious leaving the house. The other two

victims also felt nervous about going out.

Judge John Wait told Jones he would serve at least half of the four and a half year sentence in prison and the rest on licence. He will also be subject to a sexual harm prevention order for an indefinite period and placed on the sex offenders register for life.

Judge Wait said he had taken into account good character references for Jones and the fact that he had not got out of his car. But he told him that comments he had made to girls were ‘grossly inappropriate’ and caused ‘very great distress’.

Taxi driver jailed for causing death of boy

A TAXI driver from Dudley has been jailed for six years for causing the death of a 12-year-old boy in a crash.

Amar Atwal, of Great Barr, suffered ‘devastating’ brain injuries after being thrown from a car by the force of the impact.

Nadeem Hussain caused the crash after he failed to stop at a junction in Stone Cross, where he should have given way.

CCTV footage played to the jury at Birmingham Crown Court showed Hussain’s Vauxhall Astra go straight across Hollyhedge Road from Thursfield Road into the oncoming Mitsubishi Outlander, which ended up on its roof.

Paramedics battled to save young backseat passenger Amar, who had not been wearing a seat belt, but he died two days later from his injuries at Birmingham Children’s Hospital. The schoolboy’s cousin, also 12, was seriously injured.

Investigators calculated that Hussain, aged 35, of Lloyd Street, was travelling at around 36mph in a 30mph zone. The Mitsubishi, being driven by Amar’s relative Gurvinder Kaur, was also judged to have been going above the speed limit, at about 50mph. Prosecutors said it was Hussain who caused the crash, as he had driven straight across the junction where there were ‘clear’ give way markings.

Cabbie Hussain was off-duty at the time of the accident, in May last year.

The jury took an hour to find him guilty of causing death by dangerous driving and on two counts of causing serious injury by dangerous driving.

Risk

Hussain was on the way to visit his sister and told the jury that he had braked on the approach to the junction but carried on across as he could see no vehicles coming. He blamed the driver of the Mitsubishi. Adam Western, prosecuting, described his account as ‘rubbish’.

Judge Francis Laird QC said Hussain had shown no remorse. He told him: “You took a risk. What you did that fateful evening will last with others for the rest of their lives.”

Schoolboy Amar was a footballer for Willenhall-based Sporting Khalsa and attended Queen Mary’s Grammar School in Walsall.

Amar’s parents revealed that they had tried to conceive for five years before IVF treatment allowed them to have their beloved son. His mother, Sukhjinder Atwal, recalled that when she last saw her son alive he had given her a hug and told her he loved her. His family revealed that Amar’s organs had been donated to help others.



Beloved son Amar Atwal hugged, kissed and told his mother he loved her, the day before his death



Nadeem Hussain took a risk at a junction and as a result one schoolboy died and another was injured

MP forging group to give region a voice

DUDLEY North MP Ian Austin is establishing a new group uniting politicians across party divides to speak up for the West Midlands in Parliament.

The new All-Party Parliamentary Group for the West Midlands will be an officially recognised platform for the region’s MPs, businesses, councils and other organisations to put forward their views in Parliament.

Mr Austin is chairing the new group along with the Conservative MP for Stafford Jeremy Lefroy.

MPs from across the region and from all parties can sign up.

The group will focus on issues including devolution of power to the region, investment in local infrastructure, industry and skills, discussions and reports.

Labour MP Mr Austin said: “I

grew up here, so I want the West Midlands to be a strong region again, with strong industries, a strong community and strong public services.

“We need to be proud of our past and take inspiration from it as we forge a new industrial revolution and bring high-tech manufacturing jobs into the region. That’s why I am establishing this new group.”

NEWS IN BRIEF

Faster broadband is in more areas

ANOTHER 30,000 businesses and households are now able to access high-speed fibre broadband, thanks to the ambitious Black Country Broadband Project which is running.

Areas of Halesowen, Kingswinford, Lye, Penn, Sedgley, Stourbridge and Wolverhampton are among the latest communities to benefit from the ongoing upgrade.

The progress was welcomed by Stourbridge firm Cox & Plant, which upgraded to faster fibre broadband for its business and has seen a ten-fold increase in download speeds.

Travel website accolade for zoo

DUDLEY Zoo has been awarded a TripAdvisor 2016 Certificate of Excellence after receiving lots of positive feedback from visitors.

The award reflects consistently high ratings for the attraction on the popular TripAdvisor travel website. Staff say they were delighted.

Zoo director Derek Grove said: “This accolade confirms what a great day out visitors have at Dudley Zoo. We’ve had a great year and have continued to invest across the site with new exhibits. Visitor numbers have also been on the increase.”

Festive singing by ladies choir

A WOMEN’S choir from the Black Country which is celebrating its 40th year is to hold a Christmas concert.

The Lower Gornal-based Ellenvale Singers host Colours of Christmas at Brierley Hill Civic Hall on Wednesday (December 14) at 7.30pm with special guests Sovereign Brass and pupils from Roberts Primary School in Lower Gornal.

Tickets are £7.50 for adults and £3.50 for children, available at the box office on the night.

Songsters perform at Christmas concert

A POPULAR Dudley choir will be performing carols and other Christmas favourites at a festive concert this weekend.

The Gentlemen Songsters Male Voice Choir will put on a show at Dudley Town Hall on Saturday.

They will be joined by the choir from Lutley Primary School, in Halesowen.

Tickets cost £10 and can be ordered by calling 01746 763850 or online at www.gsmvc.org.uk

Services to remember

THE annual remembrance services are being held at Gornal Wood Cemetery and Crematorium on Sunday with services in the chapel at 11am and 3pm for people who held funerals of loved ones at the site during 2016. Tickets can be reserved from the office in Chase Road on (01384) 813782.

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IN politics, it is unwise to assume anything. So don't be carried away by the assumption this week that Paul Nuttall, the new leader of Ukip who speaks with a broad Merseyside accent, will be a natural magnet for working-class voters in general and Labour voters in particular. Whatever Scousers may like to believe, not everybody loves a Scouse accent.

HOWEVER, I do admire Nuttall's suggestion of rejecting the endlessly convoluted and time-consuming Article 50 process and asking Parliament to repeal the 1972 European Communities Act to kick-start the Brexit process. Today, this is being presented as something outrageous. In fact, throughout our 40-year membership of the Union, we were assured time after time by the Europhiles that if the UK ever wanted to quit, it was a simple matter of repealing the Act. If it was true then, it must be true now. And if it has never been true, let us call the liars to account.

IN an interview, Beattie Edmondson, 29-year-old daughter of Jennifer Saunders and husband Adrian Edmondson, says as a child she had no idea what her showbiz parents did. By chance, I have been catching up on Bottom, the BBC comedy series screened from 1991-95 starring Ade Edmondson and the late, great Rik Mayall. Because of its frantic, gratuitous violence and treatment of women as sex objects, Bottom could never be commissioned today and yet it was one of the funniest and most inventive TV comedies ever made. That's what your dad did, Beattie. In a wilder age, he pushed the boundaries and made millions laugh. Be proud of him.

AFTER the recent tale of a mouse gnawing through a car's fuel pipe, the most popular deterrent to under-bonnet rodents, according to the internet, seems to be peppermint oil. I have duly dunked some cotton wool in the aromatic oil and fixed it in the engine compartment. Now it's like driving a very big After Eight mint.

Don't miss Peter Rhodes every Monday to Friday in your Express & Star

14-year-old put behind bars for knife attack

A 14-year-old schoolboy who slashed a man across the stomach in Sedgley High Street has been locked up for three years.

The teenager, who cannot be named for legal reasons, attacked 18-year-old scaffolder Daniel Hunt slicing open his abdomen. He has been left with a scar from hip to hip.

Mr Hunt was stabbed with a six-inch blade and left on the ground as the attacker fled the scene.

By Nick Humphreys

Prosecutor Linda Cortese told Wolverhampton Crown Court: "Mr Hunt and his girlfriend were in Sedgley High Street at around 5.45pm (on October 9) heading to a convenience store. They came across a group of males who Mr Hunt had previously had a falling out with.

Hospital

"There had been a previous argument with the defendant's cousin. The defendant took a hat from Mr Hunt. Someone shouted to them that they should sort it out in the car park. Mr Hunt started to remove his bag as he expected he was about to get involved in a fight. Someone shouted 'put the knife away' to the defendant, who then stabbed the victim.

"Mr Hunt was taken to hospital. He required emergency surgery."

The court heard that the defendant was arrested and interviewed. He admitted seeing Mr Hunt and

speaking to him but said he blacked out and didn't know whether he produced the knife or used it.

In his victim statement, Mr Hunt said: "I could have died and for what? Since this happened, I have been scared to go out. It's had an effect on my whole life."

The court also heard that the victim had lost his job because of the injury and would not be able to work again until March. He was in hospital for five days.

The attacker, who pleaded guilty to wounding with intent to cause grievous bodily harm and possession of a bladed article, had a previous conviction for battery. Defence barrister Stanley Reiz said: "He has a problem managing his anger. He acknowledges what he did was incredibly serious. He has written a letter to the court apologising to the victim and has genuine remorse." The boy will serve his sentence in a Young Offenders Institute.

Go West calling on Beth



Dudley pop star and former Merry Hill shop girl Beth Sherburn

POP sensations from the 1980s Go West are celebrating 30 years in showbiz with a special gig in the Black Country tomorrow night (Friday) - and are calling on star from a local pop singer.

From working in a Merry Hill store to singing on stage at Wembley Arena, it's been a whirlwind few years for Lower Gornal singer Beth Sherburn. Now the 25-year-old is to perform alongside the duo at The Robin 2 venue at Mount Pleasant, Bilston.

Go West had top ten hits including We Close Our Eyes, Call Me and King of Wishful Thinking.

Members Peter Cox and Richard Drummie will be celebrating the 30th anniversary of the group winning a Brit Award at their Robin gig.

Singer and songwriter Beth was working in Debenhams at the Merry Hill shopping centre in 2012 when she was overheard singing by top music producer John McLaughlin. He went on to sign her to a £250,000 record deal.

Beth has performed with the likes of Foxes, Katy B and Conor Maynard and has supported The Saturdays.

£11m cost to council for cutting workforce

MORE than £11 million was forked out by Dudley Council on employees' redundancy packages in one year.

The Labour-controlled council made at least 134 voluntary and two compulsory redundancies in the last financial year.

Bosses revealed they had spent £11.3m on redundancy packages. It is a sharp rise from three years before, when the council spent £2.68m on redundancies over the same time period. In total, the council has spent £25m in packages over the past four years.

Bosses blame the redundancies on 'unprecedented cuts' from Government, which has left the council scrambling to make ends meet. But opposition councillors say the scale of the payouts are like lotto wins for senior staff.

Councillor Patrick Harley, leader of the Conservative group, said: "A lot of the redundancy money has gone to senior staff, who walk away with small lottery wins. Thanks to our perseverance the council will now only pay the statutory required amount."

Councillor Judy Foster, deputy leader of the council, said: "In the last six years we have seen a £76m reduction in funding, which is set to rise to £92m over the next three years. As a result, we have had to look at ways of working differently and this has inevitably had an impact on the number of staff."

Advertisement

WORKS' parties, fairy lights, expectant youngsters writing gift lists, creative school Nativity plays where the wise men are replaced by aliens - it must be Christmas soon.

A time defined by more frenzied family activity than any other celebration on our calendars, stress levels begin to soar from the beginning of November.

But for a special group of people the normal irritating distractions that hinder festivities are magnified. Gift-buying, crowded store check-outs, seemingly ceaseless TV advertising for celebrity-branded perfumes and carols being played in shopping centres all too early, are no more of a problem to them than the rest of us.

For these people, the real 'Ba humbug!' moments are deeply personal - secrets that have been cleverly hidden away for years.

Often feeling foolish at the very thought of a 'confession' they continue every Christmas to stoically endure the celebrations, aching for them to finish soon.

But the truth is, this Christmas could be very different for those countless denture wearers whose teeth are no longer able to function the way they should.

Hidden smiles

The natural harmonious fit that should exist between prosthetics and the soft tissues of the mouth is no longer there and the consequence is at best miserable, but regularly life-changing for worse.

How do I know? For nearly 30 years I've been involved in denture provision and have been responsible for helping to resolve some of the worst-case scenarios ever to present to a dentist.

If you have denture issues and are reading this, chances are I've encountered your denture problem many times.

Poor dentures can steal spontaneity - even the natural response to those Christmas joyous moments can be stifled as laughing can be perilous, with the lower prosthetic tilting and slipping. Sadly, laughing can also present an opportunity for the very worst of 'denture moments' when the prosthetic loses all adhesion.

And as for seasonal colds... coughing is something that, certainly for some, needs to be done



Party food Hell for poor dentures - seeded breads



Ill-fitting dentures and nuts just don't mix



Dry turkey can also be a problem for ill-fitting teeth



Royal icing on Christmas cake - too hard for some

Will it be a difficult denture Christmas?

The heralds of Christmas are all around us - lights, crowds of shoppers and the first flush of works' parties. For most people it all promises to be loads of fun, but for some who wear dentures, the seasonal frivolity is no laughing matter. Principal of the Denture Clinic and North Street Dental and Implant Clinic, STEVEN BURCHELL DipCDT RCS(Eng) GDC 108353, offers a timely message of hope

with teeth out. Stifled laughter, smiles hidden behind hands; is this any way to live when an answer can be so close at hand?

There are those too, whose days are strategically planned around the need to replenish dental fixative on their teeth.

Copious supplies are needed, secreted away in handbags, bathrooms, kitchens, cars, pockets, bags and other hiding places.

Just the simple task of eating a Christmas meal can become a hurdle which demands 'must-have' strategies to survive the event.

Do you recognise any of the following?

- The need for plausible excuses to leave the dining table to reload the dental fixative halfway through a meal
- That you must be seated where as few people

as possible can see you eating

- Have excuses already in mind for missing out on that hard, royal icing Christmas cake, or Christmas pudding infused with brandy... and nuts

- Ensuring you don't have an extra glass of wine for fear of forgetting those dangerous dentures which seemingly have a mind of their own
- Struggling with sore spots and longing for the meal to end soon. Just too much pain
- Needing to go home early, just to get your teeth out

- Embarrassed by sunken cheeks and pinched lips and looking older than your years because your teeth are orally misplaced

- Ashamed by the aesthetics of your dentures which look like they just don't belong to your face

New dentures ready for Christmas Don't miss out!

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- Simply not wanting to join in the celebrations; always having to find a reason to avoid socialising
- A life ruled by dentures that just don't work - especially where there's party food
- No longer able to enjoy your favourite foods
- Restricted diet and generally a poor nutritional intake on a daily basis

I once heard of a tragic case where a lady in her 80s had lived her whole adult life as a "consummate actress" because of failing false teeth.

She went out only to work, had no social life and rarely spoke to anyone.

She was deeply troubled by her dentures and the issues relating to them eclipsed her life.

A complex clinical case, I was privileged to help

transform her life for the better many years ago.

She learned to live again in the latter years, making new friends, going to restaurants and stopping for conversations in the street. Her regret - and mine too - that she just accepted her problem. Afraid of the dentist and fearful her appointment with me would disappoint, she suffered in silence.

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Job losses as firm closure ends an era

NEARLY a century of Black Country engineering history have been brought to an end after Smethwick Drop Forge was closed with the loss of 43 jobs.

The company, based in Stourport Road, Kidderminster, could trace its roots back to a fire-irons maker in Dudley in 1926. The firm had been struggling in recent years with declining sales, making a £300,000 loss in 2015.

It made highly engineered connecting rods for truck and automotive companies, supplying customers such as Jaguar Land Rover, Perkins Engines, Fiat and Ford.

Chris Pole and Mark Orton from KPMG Restructuring were appointed joint administrators to Smethwick Drop Forge, then closed the business and made the staff redundant.

KPMG said it was appointed after "a prolonged period of declining sales, and in the absence of a buyer, following efforts by management to sell the business."

Chris Pole, a partner at KPMG, said: "Like many suppliers in the manufacturing industry, Smethwick Drop Forge has been affected by difficult trading conditions which has ultimately resulted in the directors taking the difficult decision to close its operations and place the business into administration. Our main focus is on supporting employees with their redundancy claims and seeking a buyer for the business' assets."

Candlelight carols

HALESOWEN Choral Society will be performing Carols by Candlelight on Saturday evening at St Margaret's Church, in Hasbury. Tickets cost £8 for the 7.30pm concert, including refreshments, and can be bought on the door or by calling 0121 550 7206.

Christmas gifts, charity cash and cars stolen from centre

Homes built on 'eyesore' site of pub



Nine houses are being built on the site of the Cooksey pub in Cradley Heath, which had been a 'grot spot'

THE site of an empty pub that had become a magnet for vandals and fly-tippers is in the process of being redeveloped, to the delight of residents and local councillors.

The land at the junction of Halesowen Road, Highland Road and Mildred Road, Cradley Heath, was sold earlier this year for more than £300,000.

It had become subject to fly-tipping,

vandalism and anti-social behaviour after the demolition of The Cooksey hotel and pub.

Councillor Susan Eaves, who represents Rowley ward, said: "It had been empty for quite a while and it had been some years since the pub went.

Lots of residents complained about it being empty and attracting mess and fly-tipping. "But the great thing is the building work is now about halfway

through. It's great news for the area and we look forward to them being completed. I welcomed the development of the site for housing because residents have had to live with this eyesore for far too long."

Seven three-bedroom town houses and two two-bedroom apartments are now nearing completion on the site, which had been labelled a grot spot by Sandwell Council in recent years.

RAIDERS ransacked a day centre that supports adults with learning disabilities causing around £20,000 of damage and leaving staff and families devastated.

Two cars, computers, charity money and Christmas presents were stolen during the raid early on Saturday morning.

The burglars also poured anti-freeze, engine oil and paint throughout the premises of Pinnacle Supports in Hayes Lane, Stourbridge.

Bosses who run the centre, which supports around 40 people, called the attack 'devastating'.

Company director Anna Scott, 49, of Halesowen, said: "They broke their way into the back of the property by smashing a window. It looks like they used anti-freeze and paint and emptied it all over the floor. They also poured engine oil into shoe boxes which we had been collecting with items to give to the Salvation Army."

Wheelchair

"Two of our cars were stolen. The thieves also stole a safe and carried it off in a wheelchair. Inside was £200 which the centre had raised from a Macmillan coffee morning in November. It is soul-destroying."

"But we have got a great team of staff. We have been pulling together so we don't let the clients down because families rely on us."

One of the stolen cars had been involved in a crash in Furlong Lane, Cradley, on Saturday evening and the other had been recovered after being abandoned in Compton Road, Cradley Heath.

Bosses expected the centre to be fully up and running within a few days. A fundraising justgiving page has been set up on the internet.

Police ask anyone with information about the raid to call them on 101.

Interviews to start for new boss at trust

THE next step in the hunt for a new chief executive at the trust which runs Dudley's Russells Hall Hospital begins this week.

Interviewing for the top role was taking place on Tuesday following the departure of Paula Clark in September.

She left after seven years to become chief executive at Stafford County Hospital from October 1.

Dr Paul Harrison, who has been acting chief executive at the Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust, will become deputy chief executive, it has been announced.

He said: "I am very pleased by the board's decision and I look forward to supporting the new chief executive in leading the organisation and building on our successes. The NHS is entering a new era and our organisation is committed to leading the way in partnership working."

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IN MY VIEW

with Mark Andrews



Plastic not fantastic, or tasteful for vegans

APPARENTLY the new plastic £5 note contains some animal fat, and this has made some militant vegans very angry.

And broad-minded right-on so-and-so that I am, I can see where they are coming from. These new fivers taste dreadful, far too salty, and if you eat three or more you get the most terrible indigestion.

So, to be helpful, and prevent any unfortunate issues from arising, I am going to offer my services.

Any vegans who unwittingly come into contact with the new fiver, please feel free to send them to me at the Chronicle – the address is on the opposite page – and I promise to dispose of them responsibly.

Well, I promise to dispose of them, anyway.

I SUPPOSE we should be pleased that local authorities are to get a £2.4 million boost to deal with potholes in this neck of the woods.

Some of the roads around here, particularly in the more rural areas, are a disgrace, and I'm sure many of us will at some time or other have had to fork out the £150-plus for a damaged alloy wheel because of this.

However, forgive me for sounding a note of caution.

A few months ago I noticed some workmen laying a cable from one side of the road to the other.

It involved a digging a trench about six inches deep, and maybe eight inches in width, and frankly it could have been covered by a bit of hardboard when the work was not being done.

It wasn't, of course. Instead there were temporary traffic lights in operation for an entire week, three days while the work was done on one side of the road, four days for the other.

This resulted in traffic delays even when there were no other cars about, such as the early hours of the morning. All for 12ft of cable.

This wouldn't have mattered so much had it not been for the fact that at one point there were three similar sets of lights along my route to work.

In Seisdon, the work was confined to the pavement, but they still found it necessary to surround it with barriers and install a set of traffic lights.

Now would that have happened 30 or even 20 years ago?

I can't help but think that back then the work would have been done in a couple of days, with a few cones around the affected area.

Now, it seems that for even the most minor of works, the full play set has to come out.

Yes, the potholes in our roads need to be repaired.

I just dread the disruption that the work is going to cause.



Filming Invisible Woman



With fiancée Neilum Raqia, they met on the set of BBC's Doctors



John in the background in a supermarket in Coronation Street



The couple on the Casualty set

John in extra special hope for film success

He's a regular on our TV screens, but now extra John Walker is changing direction.

RICHARD GUTTRIDGE reports

HE has been used to being in the background during his career but one of the country's most prolific TV extras is now taking centre stage.

Scroll down the shows in the TV guide and John Walker will have appeared in most of them.

Casualty, The Bill, Hollyoaks – the Dudley actor has been there and done it.

But he has made the unlikely transition from background filler to promising movie director after a film he directed himself was shown in cinemas around the world.

His budget horror film, Amityville, which was partly filmed in the Black Country, was a box office hit in the Philippines – after he ploughed £30,000 into the project.

Scary movie fans will recognise the name immediately, with Mr Walker's low-budget flick taking inspiration from the classic The Amityville Horror.

Counters

Part of the film was shot at Wednesbury Town Hall, which took on the guise of an eerie American library. It is not just as a hospital patient or enjoying a pint in the Queen Vic where you might have spotted John.

You may well recognise him from the food counters at Tesco in Dudley, where he still hasn't given up the day job despite having his films watched all over the world.

He said: "I've been doing extra work for years, but I finally decided it was time to make my own film which I had planned to shoot in the UK.

"One of my films has done well in the USA, Canada and UK on DVD. It even had six cinema showings in the UK.

"I can't believe how well it's done. I guess I'm very lucky."



On the set of his film Amityville, shot around the Black Country, including Wednesbury Town Hall

"It's since been dubbed into German, turned 3D and released on blu-ray in Germany and currently is enjoying a nationwide cinema release in the Philippines."

John has made more than 2,000 TV appearances, starting in 200 different shows including regular spots in Holby City, Doctors and Midsomer Murders.

He has also been in films, with one of his most notable appearances as Archie the butler alongside Harry Potter star Daniel Radcliffe in 2012 thriller The Woman in Black.

John said: "I was working in a supermarket when I started working as a TV extra.

"I made some contacts and in 2008 I worked on production design for a TV pilot called 'Spooked' which didn't become a series but I learned a lot." He continued: "Amityville cost me my entire savings.

"Even after it was dubbed into German, made into 3D, sold on blu-ray and had a nationwide Philippines cinema release, I made not 1p back. Not a penny as it seems the American distributor went bankrupt. It's all about loving the genre and film-making, I'm one of the few who's happy on both sides of the camera.

"Amityville was my first directed film and I was lucky. It was sold at retail giants, Walmart and Target in the USA and Canada and in Morrisons, Asda and Sainsbury's over here. Funnily enough, Tesco never took it."

John has worked as a first assistant director on four feature films: Arjun and Alison, Deadtime, Cry Wolf, The Truth, with an additional eight short films under his directing belt. The critics weren't always kind but John insisted it was an achievement just to have some of



John seen on screen with John Barrowman



TV extra John Walker's day job at Tesco Dudley

the heavyweights scrutinising his movie. He added: "The Guardian said it was rubbish, but they still reviewed my movie so I felt that legitimised it."

Patience is key when you're a television actor, according to John, who says it can involve a lot of waiting around before a few minutes of action. An ability to blend into the background is also important. Speaking earlier this year about his career progression, he explained: "You have got to be patient. Really we are just living, breathing props they need to keep warm and feed.

"The actors are the real stars. Some people have ideas above their stations. We are there just to be in the background. Our job is to help bring a scene to life. The audience's eyes may only be on the actors but the background also has to look right."

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Time to say no to these Government cuts

LIKE many others, apart from the cutting councillors, I am totally opposed to the closure of all of the leisure centres in the Dudley borough. The Labour Council should be ashamed for even proposing it.

Ashamed? The Tories have not heard of that particular emotion, but Labour once actually fought to help people. I guess that was a long, long time ago and this is the new Labour in Dudley.

Can't we hear it when Councillor Khurshid Ahmed describes proposals to axe three leisure centres and open two as 'exciting proposals'. If this is

his idea of excitement we have differing views.

What would be exciting would be to keep open our three leisure centres and build two to replace those which have been closed at Brierley Hill and Coseley.

I decided to sign a petition against closure and into my search engine on the computer I typed in: 'Save Our Leisure Centres'. I did not expect it to come up with campaigns to Save Our Leisure Centres in Chesterfield, Durham, Southampton, Falmouth, Stocksbridge, Manchester, Sherborn,

Gateshead, to name but some!

These are the Tory Government cuts and carried out by its willing poodles - Labour Councils. I wonder if they also trotted out tired, worn out excuses to justify their intended cuts?

When will one council stand up and say we cannot do this to people and just say 'No! We believe we were elected to help people and not make things worse for them?'

Then we, the public, might have more respect for politicians.

C STOLL
Halesowen

Ridiculous! The Press should not pay loser's court costs

THE idea that any press organisation should pay the costs of an opponent who loses a case against them is patently ridiculous.

There will be a flood of spurious and vexatious claims against the press; safe in the knowledge that there will be no financial penalty.

The likes of Maxwell are long gone but the proposal that cheating footballers, 'stars', 'celebrities' and thieving politicians should be immune from genuine investigative journalism is scandalous.

The financier for such an act, Max Mosley, may well have a right to be vexed but many of the self-righteous 'celebrities' are deserving of a very public airing of their activities.

TREVOR HOWARD
Wolverhampton

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POST

Dudley Chronicle,
Chronicle Editorial,
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Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES

EMAIL

dudley.chrons@
expressandstar.co.uk

Letters should be brief and MUST include name, address and telephone number. The Editor reserves the right to condense letters.

Palace money should go to the homeless

THE announcement that the Government will spend £30 million on refurbishing the 700 plus rooms in Buckingham Palace highlights the priorities of the Conservative Party.

Within one mile of the palace, hundreds of homeless people live and sleep on filthy pavements, in stinking alleyways and on park benches.

If we have a harsh winter, it is almost 100 per cent certain that some homeless people will die.

How many shelters, hostels or starter homes could be built with that sum of money? I am not saying that it shouldn't happen, just that the homeless and the housing crisis should have a higher priority.

As Her Majesty is at the head of the Church in Britain, I would like to think that she would prefer to honour one of the most important duties of any Christian, that is: to help those most in need.

I am not really that surprised, however. Despite the rhetoric to the contrary, every Conservative Government I can remember has rushed to the aid of the rich and left the poor to fend for themselves. We still await the 'trickle down of wealth' promised by Thatcher in 1979.

MICHAEL CLIFF
Wall Heath

Commuter parking hits residents

IN reply to the letter from D Bunce regarding the parking in Coseley.

We have been constantly on at Dudley Council about the train commuters using our street (Bridgewater Drive) as an overflow car park. We have our drives blocked by inconsiderate people, cars are double parked and parked on the pavement causing obstruction.

All the residents are fed up and the council don't want to know. This all started when yellow lines were put down a couple of years ago and has pushed the problem into the residential streets.

These commuters need somewhere to park so until the council wise up and take action to provide extra parking, the problem will never go away.

From one very fed up resident who just wants to be able to park outside my own property!

MRS I ELWELL
Coseley



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8 Feedback call on red phone boxes

Halesowen Chronicle Thursday, December 8, 2016

MORE than 150 traditional red phone boxes in the Black Country and Staffordshire could be scrapped.

BT Group is carrying out a 90-day consultation period, due to end in January, to determine which 171 phone boxes may be taken out of use.

The telecommunications group wants to get feedback from local residents in the regions after 49 of them in total were not used even once in the past 12 months. In the Black Country, 18 Dudley phone boxes could go – five of which were not used in the past year. While 14 boxes in including two which made no calls in Sandwell.

Eleven Wolverhampton phone boxes could be scrapped, with two not used and 17 in Walsall, of which four were unused.

BT Group says the consultation process will give local communities the opportunity to keep a traditional red 'heritage' phone box and make them an asset that local people can enjoy, if they are switched off. For just £1, communities can 'adopt' a box, giving it a new lease of life as something completely different.

To adopt a phone box call business.bt.com/phone-services/payphone-services/adopt-a-kiosk/

Alternatively, contact your local authority to stake a claim for keeping red phone boxes in traditional working use.

Little Mix reveal extra Brum date

ONE of the biggest girl groups around, Little Mix have announced an extra date at Birmingham's Genting Arena, next autumn.

The four-piece will stop off at the arena as part of The Glory Days tour with their newly announced show taking place on October 13. Tickets for the new date are on sale now from www.theticketfactory.com or by calling 0844 33 88 222 with prices starting from £28.93.

Fraud team in clampdown on tenants who were sub-letting

British Gas offices shut doors for good



The Swallowfield One premises in Wolverhampton Road, Oldbury, which closed down last month

BRITISH Gas offices in Oldbury have closed their doors for the final time with the loss of more than 600 jobs.

The energy firm revealed plans in April to close its office at Swallowfield One. A total of 645 jobs were axed.

Now British Gas has confirmed its offices closed earlier this month. The giant has revealed 420 of the Oldbury staff have now found new jobs elsewhere.

Sandwell Council leaders called the closure a 'devastating blow' to Oldbury which has also seen the loss of jobs at

Npower and Carphone Warehouse. The latest figures from Sandwell Council reveal more than 200 former British Gas workers remain out of work following the closure at Oldbury.

Councillor Stephen Jones, chairman of the jobs, economy and enterprise scrutiny board, said: "This is just another devastating blow to Oldbury. More than 600 jobs have gone here, and with 1,400 jobs lost at Npower in Oldbury and those at Carphone Warehouse in the town, that adds up to more than 2,000. I would like to know

why those jobs have gone at British Gas. I think it is unfair that because five per cent of their share prices were lost, we lose almost 700 jobs."

Councillor Jones said the figure for staff out of work was revealed at the last committee meeting in October. But an update on that number will be delivered at the next meeting. Sandwell Council and Job Centre Plus stepped in to help staff find new jobs following the losses at British Gas in Oldbury. The offices were closed on November 11.

FRAUDSTERS have been caught out sub-letting their council houses. A crackdown uncovered four council tenants who brazenly let their properties out.

They were caught following an investigation by Sandwell Council's CCTV and fraud teams. Footage showed three properties being used by people who were not the tenants. At the other, images showed a tenant living at a different property resulting in benefit over payments.

The fraud meant families on the borough's massive housing waiting list were being denied a roof over their heads. The four tenants were evicted and bosses said it was unlikely they would be given council housing again. Getting back the properties is expected to save the cash-strapped council £400,000. The action has seen the properties go back into legitimate use.

Sandwell Council leader Steve Eling said: "It is a crime and a serious issue about people having tenancies on council houses they are not entitled to.

Qualified

"If they have moved on and bought a house, for them to sub-let it out to other people and make a profit on it, which is what they tend to do, then it is a crime and they should be duly prosecuted. We often mention people on waiting lists applying for council housing and every one of these houses that is unlawfully and fraudulently let out means that somebody who is qualified and on waiting lists is missing out," he said.

Sandwell Council wants to build about 600 homes over the next three years, at a cost of £74.1 million. As well as building homes from scratch, the authority is also keen to buy homes on new developments from house builders to boost numbers.

Earlier this year it was revealed there were more than 6,000 people in the borough on the council house waiting list.

£450k set to put Sabbath on the map

ARTS Council England is due to invest £450,000 in an international programme exploring the legacy of iconic Birmingham rock band Black Sabbath.

The money will go to Digbeth-based arts organisation Capsule which will help bring together Black Sabbath fans with artists, academic institutions and cultural venues around the world. The organisation's programme is called Home of Metal.

It will last for three years after its launch in February, in Birmingham. The council's Peter Knott said: "Capsule has created events and exhibitions which celebrate music from Birmingham and the Black Country. Now, it will be brilliant to see our funding supporting them to reach out to international audiences, exploring and sharing how the cultural heritage of the West Midlands has shaped musical tastes around the world."

Capsule's Lisa Meyer said: "We will be celebrating what is at the heart of the genre – the fans."

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Fitting send-off for war veteran Jack, aged 95

HE was a described as a private person who served in the RAF in the Second World War – but preferred not to speak about the war.

Jack Rowe, aged 95, was laid to rest at a funeral held last week at Stourbridge Crematorium where the Last Post was played by a bugler from the Royal British Legion.

Widower Jack was born in Romsley, near Halesowen. He was married for more than 60 years, until his wife died.

Pastor Steve Hyde led the service and told the congregation that Jack loved cricket as a youth and, after service in the RAF, had a career in journalism. He worked at the Birmingham Evening Gazette and then the Birmingham Evening Mail.

Two legion members stood at the front of the service with standards, one stood at the back with the bugle and played the Last Post, as the area's ex-services personnel ensured Mr Rowe had a fitting send-off at the 40 minute service.

The Chairman of Cradley Royal British Legion and Ex-Servicemen Association, Norman Catton, said: "Jack was a good old guy, he cared about other people."

Mr Catton, aged 81, said his friend was a very private man who he understood had served in the RAF but did not like to talk about the war years, perhaps because of the memories it brought back.

Barbara Woodin, landlady at the Edward VII pub in Halesowen, said Jack was a regular, having lunch at the pub most days.



Standard bearers at Mr Rowe's funeral



Jack Rowe - regular at Edward VII pub



Ex-services people rallied for the funeral of Mr Rowe at Stourbridge Crematorium

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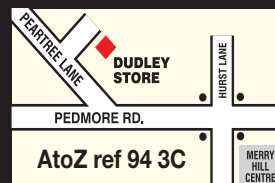
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Members go wild over garden talk

Harvest sale funds to be distributed

Wordsley Gardening Club

CHAIRMAN Julie Willetts welcomed 37 members and visitor Mary Hill to the November meeting. It was an awful evening resulting in a lower attendance than usual number and a long apology list.

It was reported that Hazel Needham would not be available to represent the guild at future federation meetings, but Jean Latham volunteered to fill the post. A letter of thanks had been received from Betty Noke for the well wishes sent following a hip operation.

Pat Archer reported that bowls had now finished until April. The Amblers had enjoyed a final walk around Wolverley and would meet again in January. At their recent meeting the 'Flower Ladies' had enjoyed creating a floral Christmas tree while 'The Ladies who Lunch' section had enjoyed a visit to Bodenham Arboretum. Thanks went to Chris Picken who had organised the trip.

The speaker for the evening was Ann Hartley, a Severn Valley Railway volunteer, who gave details of the various jobs she was required to do during her day. The history of the railway spans 150 years and is run by an army of volunteers and enthusiastic railway engineers. It attracts 200,000 visitors every year.

Competition winners were Sandra Oliver and Elizabeth Grove, while raffle prizes went to Sue Carless, Jill Dunn and Jean Latham. The chairman thanked the refreshment ladies Ann, Powell and Ann Turner.

THE last meeting of the club was held on November 9 at Wordsley Green Community Centre with 21 members attending.

The speaker for the evening was Adam Greathead, head gardener for John Massey's garden at Ashwood Nurseries, and his talk 'Duck Pools - a garden divided' was most beautifully illustrated with slides of different areas absolutely packed with plants both rare and ordinary. Duck Pools is the name of his house.

Everyone present enjoyed meeting Adam and listening to his presentation.

During the interval refreshments were served thanks to Mary and Larry, and the raffle drawn.

In the business part of the evening the distribution of the Harvest sale proceeds was discussed which resulted in the decision to give £140 to the community centre and £70 to The White House Cancer Support Group, Dudley.

The next meeting will be the AGM on January 11 at 7.30pm at the community centre when all existing committee members will step down.

It is hoped that there will be enough interested people to help keep this gardening club afloat as it would be a great loss after being in existence for more than 70 years.

Wordsley M TG

CHAIRMAN for the day Liz Hubbard welcomed a large number of members and visitors to the November meeting. Minutes were signed and a statement of accounts was available for perusal.

Barbara Taylor suggested the next theatre outing will be to The Grand, Wolverhampton for Rock of Ages in April.

The guild's Comic Relief project is progressing well with members and friends producing many craft items for a table sale at the December 19 meeting. There will also be a coffee morning, open to the public, to be held at Wordsley Green Community Centre on January 23 to raise further funds.

Pat Clements gave an excellent presentation entitled A Wildlife Garden. A stream at the end of his garden attracted birds including kingfishers and grey wagtails. He has also seen the rare spotted woodpecker. He showed short films of foxes and badgers he had photographed in his garden. Liz gave the vote of thanks.

The December 19 meeting, from 10am will be a 'Christmas Showtime' event. Stan Proudman will provide entertainment with audience participation followed by refreshments of tea, coffee and cakes.

£10 bet that launched three shops



25 years on – owner Brett Davies and apprentices he has trained

AFTER starting out in the hairdressing business on the back of a £10 bet, barber Brett Davies is now celebrating 25 years of success at his three shops.

Mr Davies, whose shops, BS1, BS2 and BS3, are in Wombourne, Wall Heath and Wordsley, began his career after his friend bet him £10 to try male hairdressing when he was 19.

He began his first job in a barber's shop, making drinks, sweeping up and washing hair. Little did he know he would go on to become hugely successful and train more than 15 young apprentices who are now hoping to follow in his footsteps. Brett, from Wombourne, is in talks about opening a fourth in Quarry Bank.

The 44-year-old said: "When I first got into this career I was ridiculed because back in the day it wasn't the thing men did. When I first opened the shop it was a big step at such a young age and I had to catch the bus for the first three years."

He takes on apprentices from the area to give them a chance to break through and get into their desired career.

Insight into work of hospice

Kingswinford TG

THERE was a reminder at the guild's November meeting, at the community centre, that new committee members were needed.

The next three Luncheon club venues were distributed and there was a reminder of the Federation carol service in St Thomas' Church Stourbridge.

The speaker was Tanya Fellows who told of the wonderful work done by Acorns Children's Hospice, followed by a moving

account of the support offered to family members during difficult circumstances by Sandra Beck, an involved grandparent.

Sue Cotterell gave thanks and a spontaneous collection made. Flowers were provided by Barbara White who wanted them as a raffle prize. June Baker and Pauline Bird won raffle prizes.

Museum in bid for £10m

BLACK Country Living Museum bosses have submitted a bid for funding which would allow a major expansion at the Tipton Road attraction.

The application for almost £10 million has been sent to the Heritage Lottery. It would fund the first part of the museum's masterplan to attract even more visitors to the attraction on the Dudley-Tipton border.

Currently the museum focuses on the Victorian-Edwardian era and the years between the wars, but museum bosses want to look at the 1940s, 50s and 60s too. The ambitious proposals include a new visitor centre, car park and extension to the museum's tram line.

Chief executive Andrew Lovett said: "We are delighted to now be in a position to submit this funding bid, which has been three years in the making."

"If successful, this development will be a significant one and will allow us to complete the museum's story."

The museum will find out if it has been successful in the spring and, if it is, work will then start towards a second funding bid in October 2018.

"We want to expand and improve our visitors' experience," said Mr Lovett.

He envisaged boosting visitors from 300,000 to 500,000 per year.

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Don kicks off new 3G pitch at college with MP



Don Goodman and Ian Austin at the launch of Dudley College's £800,000 all-weather pitch at Priory Road

DUDLEY College has opened a brand new £800,000 3G artificial pitch.

Former Wolves player Don Goodman officially unveiled the pitch at Priory Road along with MP for Dudley North, Ian Austin.

It comes as the college received a grant from the Premier League and the FA Facilities Fund, which is delivered by the Football Foundation.

The college has built a new floodlit artificial grass pitch that will be used year-round by the college's students and grassroots clubs, including Wrens Nest FC and Wordsley Wasps JFC.

A new changing room pavilion with two team changing rooms, two officials' changing rooms, a standing area and spectator toilets has also been built.

League

Sky sports pundit Don, who played nearly 600 games during his twenty year career in the Football League – including many years playing for West Bromwich Albion, Wolverhampton Wanderers and Walsall – gave his backing to the project.

He said: "It's great to see such fantastic facilities being made available to the young people of Dudley. I hope

this new facility inspires them to keep playing throughout their lives. Perhaps one day I'll be commenting on them as they run out on the pitch in the Premier League."

The Albion Foundation – charitable arm of West Bromwich Albion – will offer a range of activities on the pitch, including Premier League Kicks and a Player Development Centre.

Mr Austin said: "These new all-weather pitches help keep youngsters fit and healthy, off the streets and out of trouble, so I want to thank Dudley College for their hard work and the Premier League and The FA Facilities Fund for the financial support."

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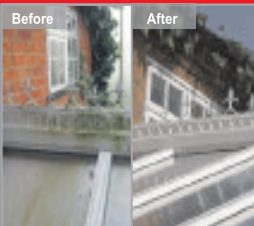
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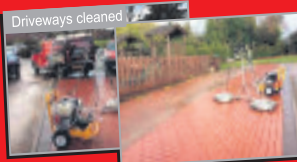
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12 Hospital is 'doing all it can' to recruit

Halesowen Chronicle Thursday, December 8, 2016

RUSSELLS Hall Hospital in Dudley was understaffed on more than 130 occasions over a month, figures reveal.

The hospital sets a required amount of care and support staff for each shift. But, in October, the hospital was unable to meet that number over 136 shifts. This was the highest number of occasions in a month since December 2015.

Bosses at the Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust expected the number to drop to normal levels during last month.

The hospital has been struggling to fill vacancies, according to a report to the Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust.

Shift numbers were made up of figures for both registered staff and care workers.

Where vacancies have caused problems, agency staff as well as staff from other departments have had to be drafted in to fill those gaps.

Trust bosses said recruitment from the local area would continue, as would advertising for registered nurses.

Doctor Paul Harrison, acting chief executive at the trust, said: "In October we saw a higher than expected

By Jamie Brassington

number of patients with complex needs.

"For example, our maternity unit had a higher than expected number of complex births. This explains the increase in the number of shifts under the required levels of staff.

"We have robust escalation systems to manage these situations and patient safety was maintained."

Dr Harrison added: "There is a national shortage of many health professionals, specifically registered nurses.

"We are doing all we can to recruit new staff."

This included regular recruitment days, encouraging former and retired health professionals to return and exploring further European Union recruitment.

Feed the birds plea for native species



Conservation officer Chris Leeson is appealing for bird feeders to put on the Castle Hill zoo site

STAFF at Dudley Zoo are appealing for bird feeders to use across the 40-acre Castle Hill site.

Dudley Zoo is also a home for native wildlife with hundreds of different small wild bird species, including chaffinches, robins, blue tits, long tail tits and nuthatches.

Workers at the site all keen to receive feeding stations and they have added plastic bird feeders to their Christmas wishlist

Chris Leeson, conservation officer, said: "Birds need to be nice and plump for the cold months to come, so we've built wooden bird tables around the site where we can feed them up with fat balls, bars and wild bird seed.

"Any help supporters can give us with bird feeder donations would be much appreciated.

"It's just as important that we care for, and provide visitors with information about, our native species as the more exotic ones we have on site, as these are the animals that people can readily find in their own back gardens."

Donations can be dropped off at the Safari Shop.

Safety rules move over the trampoline parks

POPULAR trampoline parks need more safety measures, say a group of organisations.

A total of 13 organisations including the British Gymnastics and the International Association of Trampoline Parks have backed the new series of rules to make the parks safer.

The rules that have been suggested include better lighting for clearer visibility and padding on walls or obstacles within 1.5m of an area where trampolines may be dismounted.

Figures obtained from a Freedom of Information request showed that the ambulance service were called to three trampoline parks in the Black Country 34 times between 2015 and 2016.

Incidents

Indoor trampoline parks are made up of several trampolines next to one another which can include a range of activities such as a basketball, slides and bridges to jump off.

The service were called to Flip Out on Opal Way in Stone the most, 17 times in the space of a year for a range of different incidents.

Peter Brown, chairman of the UK committee of the international association of trampoline parks, said: "As an industry we've been working very hard to increase safety across the board as this new industry started in 2014 with only four or five parks but now there are 120 parks open.

"There are no current regulations or best standards out there. Enforcing agents like the local authorities and Health and Safety England don't know what they're looking at when they're going to the parks."

Problems dealt with include fitting, trauma and lower back pain.

Air Space trampoline park in Wolverhampton, the biggest of its kind in the Midlands, was visited by the emergency services 12 times between 2015 and 2016 whilst Jump Nation on Bentley Mill Way in Walsall five times.

Suspect sought after attack



An image of a youth who police want to talk to in connection with an attack on a girl in McDonald's at Castlegate Way, Dudley, in October

A15-YEAR-OLD girl was assaulted as she tried to leave a McDonald's restaurant in Dudley.

The teenager was blocked by a male suspect in Castlegate Way restaurant and tripped over as she tried to squeeze by.

She was punched several times and received minor head injuries.

The victim was assisted by staff at the restaurant after the incident on October 24 at around 4.20pm and police want to hear from witnesses.

A CCTV image of a suspect police want to trace has been released.

Officer say that want to hear the full circumstances of what led up to the assault and are appealing for witnesses to get in touch. Anyone with information is asked to contact PC Michael Horton by emailing him at m.horton@west-midlands.pnn.police.uk with crime number 20DY/215361M/16 or call Crimestopper anonymously on 0800 555 111.

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T-shirt crew chuffed at bostin' first year in town

IT has been a bostin' first year for a Black Country business that is celebrating its move to Dudley town centre.

Black Country T Shirts, which was previously based on Reddal Hill Road in Cradley Heath, moved to Castle Street in the heart of the town on December 5 last year.

The shop sells T-shirts with slogans from the region along with thousands of custom-made print jobs.

Australia

In the 12 months since moving, the shop has printed more than 16,000 garments. This has also included items for Black Country expatriates as far away as Australia and Canada.

Stephen Pitts, director, said: "The moment we saw the Black Country

flag flying on top of the castle we knew it was the right thing to do.

"We wanted more of a retail area and with Dudley we had much of a bigger space and a lot more room for people to come and look around.

"We have quite a following and its really great to see people are pleased for us as well. Its a nice feeling.

"Our initial aim was to promote the wonderful Black Country culture and we will continue to do that."

The business first started nearly ten years ago and became an hit in the region for celebrating the Black Country and because of its cheeky slogans based on the local lingo.

Earlier this year the shop also created a T-shirt to mark the anniversary of the death of Dudley football legend Duncan Edwards.



James Watkin and Paul Palmer with Black Country flag badges and other merchandise from the shop

Cancer fatalities for under-15s is falling

THE rate at which children are dying from cancer has fallen five per cent in a decade, according to new figures.

The statistics were revealed as it was announced the bravery of children with cancer in the Black Country is to be recognised with a special award.

Thanks to more research and better treatments, the latest figures show that death rates for under-15s in the West Midlands have decreased from around 24 deaths per million children a decade ago to around 22 deaths per million children today.

According to figures between 2012 and 2014, around 145 children are diagnosed with cancer each year and around 20 die in the West Midlands.

Cancer Research's Children's Cancer Trials Team co-ordinates ground-breaking cancer trials for children and young people in specialist treatment centres across the UK.

Cancer Research UK Kids & Teens has now launched its annual Star Awards across the country to recognise survivors and patients. To nominate a child for an award, donate or fundraise, visit cruk.org/kidsandteens

Village is shocked at death of teenager

TRIBUTES have been paid to a popular teenager from Kinver who was killed in a car accident in Shropshire at the weekend.

Former Kinver High School pupil, Jack de Bell, aged 18, died after the crash on the B4176 near Telford when his Ford Fiesta hit a tree at about 4.30am on Saturday.

On the evening after his death family and friends met in his memory at the White Harte pub in the village's High Street.

His former headteacher, Chris Rogers, said: "The staff really liked him. He had a real twinkle in his eye.

"It really shocked and upset the staff here when we heard. He was a really charming and well-mannered pupil."



Jack de Bell - popular

Remember

White Harte manager Carl Coffman said: "He'd come in every weekend. He was a good lad. Always polite. It's such a shame."

Mr Coffman said around 60 people gathered at the pub on Saturday to remember the teenager.

"In the afternoon a couple of lads had come in and said there would be a few of them meeting up, but I didn't expect that scale.

"There was a lot of peo-

ple. It showed how popular he was."

The accident happened on a straight section of the B4176, which is known as the Rabbit Run, about half a mile from the Sutton Mad-dock Shell service station.

A spokesman for West Mercia Police said the teenager was pronounced dead at the scene.

Children's home is rated as 'outstanding'

STAFF at a council children's home in Dudley have been praised by Ofsted following an inspection.

The home in Dudley, which specialises in looking after young people with learning disabilities, has retained its outstanding rating.

The home, which cannot be named for legal reasons, achieved outstanding status in 2015 and inspectors continue to be impressed with standards.

Seven young people aged between 10 and 17 are currently looked after at the centre.

Ofsted praised staff for making young people feel respected, supported and ensuring they could have a 'strong sense of personal identity'.

The watchdog said the youngsters staying at the home were making huge progress.

It said staff worked closely with parents, and that by providing continuous help meant all of the young people were able to grow in confidence and develop skills to help them move towards semi-independence.

They are performing well at school, enjoying taking part in social activities and even undertaking voluntary work in their local communities, Ofsted said in its inspection report.

Dudley Council's children's services boss Councillor Ian Cooper said he was delighted with the report and praised staff at the children's home for their commitment and dedication.

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Historic trophy saved from scrapyard



With the cup is left, jeweller Aaron Sheldon and Cuttlestones auctioneer Ben Gamble, at Bowjangles, Wednesbury

ONE of the oldest trophies in football which was contested by early Wolves and Albion teams will take its rightful place in the National Football Museum after being saved from the scrapheap.

The Wednesbury Charity Cup was restored by a Black Country jeweller after being brought into his store by a customer and has now sold for more than £7,000 at auction.

It pre-dates the Football League and was won by both Wolves and Albion during the late 19th century.

Aaron Sheldon, from Wednesbury jewellers Bowjangles, admitted he thought the cup was a piece of scrap

when it was first shown to him in a worn condition. But he set to work on it and soon had it sparkling again.

The trophy caught the attention of the National Football Museum in Manchester, which houses some of the rarest and most famous football memorabilia. It went under the hammer at Cuttlestones auctioneers in Penkridge on Friday, selling for £7,250 - more than £2,000 above its guide price. The sale is also good news for Wednesbury football team Wood Green Athletic, which is due to receive 15 per cent of the sale price.

Ben Gamble, from Cuttlestones,

said: "It is an important trophy from towards the end of the 19th century. All of the main sides in the West Midlands played in it and many won it. It is nice that it was saved from being scrapped and will go on display to the public."

The Wednesbury Charity Cup dates back to 1880 and was launched as an end-of-season competition. The first team to win it was Stafford Road. Walsall Town won it in 1886 and two years later it was lifted by Wolves. Albion then got their hands on it in 1894. The competition ran until 1991 when Cradley Town were the last team to win it.



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Workers say no to Mexico

NO Goodyear workers in Wolverhampton have taken up the company's offer to work in Mexico.

The news comes as the historic business has confirmed that the plant in the city will close on December 20.

The site, on Bushbury Lane, has been in operation for the last 90 years.

A total of 330 people worked at the plant when the closure was announced last year, with 96 people still at work there.

Following the announcement of closure, Goodyear offered staff the chance to transfer to work at a plant in Mexico, but union officials say they are not surprised no one took up the offer.

Cyril Barrett, chairman of the Goodyear branch of Unite said: "It was unrealistic for anybody to move to Mexico. It would be a total change of culture and lifestyle for people coming from Wolverhampton to go there, so it doesn't surprise me that no one took up the offer."

Farewell to Beryl, zoo's elderly flamingo



Flamingo Beryl was Dudley Zoo's oldest resident

BERYL the flamingo, who was Dudley Zoo's oldest resident, has died. The Chilean flamingo was believed to be in her mid-fifties and died at the weekend.

Flamingos at the zoo are among the most-photographed species as their enclosure is one of the first to greet visitors as they go on site.

Earlier this year the zoo increased its flock of eight flamingos by 20 following the £120,000 revamp of Flamingo Falls, which saw a new running waterfall and a bigger den built, which included an internal pool where visitors can see the birds even when they were off show outside due to bad weather.

Curator Richard Brown said: "We know Beryl was here during the early 1970s and she was already an adult then so she was a very good age for the species. She was easily recognisable by her wings, as one was shorter than the other.

"Keepers had a bit of soft spot for the old girl. Having been here longer than all serving staff and all the other animals, it really is the end of an era."

New trust hope for children's social care

A NEW trust that will provide children's social care services in Sandwell could be up and running by summer 2017.

Plans were implemented in October to introduce an independent trust to run Sandwell's children's social care services. It followed the announcement in June that the council would lose control of services for the borough's children, following a six-month review which came after an 'inadequate' Ofsted rating.

Since then, the council has been working closely with commissioner Malcolm Newsam and the Department for Education to agree detailed proposals about how the trust will work.

Council bosses now say that 'significant progress' has been made and a report is set to go before the council's cabinet. It provides details about which functions within children's services will be transferred to the trust and sets out the aim for the new trust to 'go live' by summer 2017.

Ex-Yeltz man Deeney opens up on turning away from crime

FORMER Walsall and Halesowen striker Troy Deeney, whose career was disrupted when he was jailed for affray, has told of how he has got his life back on track.

The 28-year-old from Chelmsley Wood currently captains Premier League outfit Watford with eyes firmly on an England call-up. But life has not always been plain sailing for Walsall academy graduate Deeney, who spent two months in prison in 2012.

In an interview he said: "It was good growing up in Chelmsley Wood. I had a normal upbringing and everyone

looked out for everyone. I was a good kid and then I got to year seven and got detentions and I'd be on report all the time.

"The people you look up to are the drug dealers, the robbers, the schemers – they're the guys with the nice cars, the nice trainers."

After his dad was diagnosed with terminal cancer in February 2012, Deeney went out drinking in Birmingham. He ended up being part of a group involved in a brawl which left one victim with a broken jaw and another with 20 stitches. At 23, he was sentenced to 10 months prison, serving two after showing remorse.

He said: "I come back to Birmingham so I can be myself. To keep life as normal as possible. There's a moral responsibility, there's a way you can inspire people. I'm in a very fortunate position where I've learnt lessons the hard way, family are taken care of financially, and now its about trying to be the best Troy I can be."

Ex-Villa trainee Deeney started his professional career at Walsall in August 2006 and spent time on loan at Halesowen Town before making the Saddlers first team, where he scored 27 goals in 123 league appearances. Walsall sold Deeney to the Hornets for £500,000 in 2010.



Troy Deeney – back on track

Residents win postcode £3m

CHRISTMAS has come early for more than 100 Postcode Lottery winners from West Bromwich who have scooped a share of £3 million.

Lucky residents sharing a B70 postcode which covers streets in and around the town centre, walked away with huge cheques – and smiles to match.

In total, 103 players of the People's Postcode Lottery shared the cash prizes, with individual winnings ranging from £20,224 to a whopping £436,002.

But when they attended a party at Domain Plaza Hall in Lombard Street West at the weekend no-one knew how much they had won – as the actual amounts had been kept a surprise until the big day.

Terrence Horton, a semi-retired pipe fitter, who played with two tickets, walked away with the biggest prize after the full winning postcode was revealed.

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A 255 Squadron night fighter in flight



Christopher Deansley and Jack Scott



No 264 Squadron Defiants just before Dunkirk



Lewis and his mother Sandra with an Airfix kit



Defiants on the production line at Boulton Paul Aircraft

Air fighter Defiant right until the end

WOLVERHAMPTON'S highest profile contribution to World War Two was the Boulton Paul Defiant fighter.

Two squadrons of Defiants fought in the Battle of Britain, and seven squadrons fought as night fighters during the Blitz. Later the aircraft served in air-sea rescue squadrons, as an electronic countermeasures aircraft and finally as a target tug.

The Defiant had a revolutionary concept as all the guns were in the power-operated gun turret. When the prototype first flew in 1937 the turret was not yet ready, so it flew for a while as a single seater.

As production aircraft were delivered to the RAF it fell to No 264 Squadron to introduce it into service, and to work out new tactics for the new concept.

MEMORY LANE

By Alec Brew

The squadron fought over Holland and Dunkirk, where it set a record by claiming 37 German aircraft shot down for no loss to itself.

In the Battle of Britain it was joined by No 141 Squadron, but as the summer of 1940 turned to winter, and the Blitz began the Defiants, including five more squadrons, were switched to night fighting, and were the most successful aircraft until radar-equipped fighters came along.

As it was replaced as a front-line aircraft, the Defiant was still found vital roles, serving in Air-Sea Rescue squadrons, searching for downed aviators in the North Sea and Channel, and dropping life-rafts. One

squadron, No 515, became the world's first electronic countermeasures unit, jamming German radar and communications, and still the Defiant was not finished.

Large numbers were converted to the vital target-tug role, both for the RAF and the Fleet Air Arm, and even the United States Air Force.

The sole surviving original Defiant has been in the RAF Museum at Hendon for nearly 50 years, but will soon be moved to the RAF Museum at Cosford, coming home.

The Tetterton Transport Heritage Centre, which has its own Defiant cockpit on display, has stocked up with Defiant model kits, in time for Christmas. The centre, a volunteer-run charity, is open every Sunday, with many of its aircraft cockpits free to enter.



Top scoring crew Sergeants, Thorn and Barker

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Use a lid to trap heat when making soup to save energy and reduce costs



Look up some one-pot macaroni cheese recipes that don't use the oven

Winter warmers that also cut energy costs

By Kate Whiting

WINTER is well and truly on its way – which means we're finally free to forget about 'bikini bod-ies' and build up a layer of 'insulation' to keep us going – hurrah!

If you're conscious of rising energy bills, however, how can you cook your favourite comfort food in the most energy-efficient way possible?

Sarah Scrivener, smart energy expert at British Gas, says: "When fighting the chills with winter warmers, it's important to remember you don't need to have the oven on for long periods, when whipping up comfort food in the microwave takes minutes."

She also recommends upgrading to smart meters to see exactly how much money you're spending in the kitchen in real time as you're cooking, avoiding surprise energy bills.

Here are Scrivener's top tips for energy-efficient winter warmers:

1. JACKET SPUDS

Cook a jacket potato in the microwave for 10 minutes, rather than a whole hour in the oven, and save around 32p. With the average large jacket potato costing 25p, this saving can actually be more than the price of the potato itself!

2. BEANS ON TOAST

Heat baked beans in the microwave rather than on the hob, then let the heat of the beans melt the cheese instead of putting it under the grill. Tuck into beans on toast with this method once a week over the winter months, and you could save 36p.

3. PUMPKIN PIE

Save energy (and precious time) by swapping fresh pumpkin for a handy can of pumpkin puree – the perfect consistency for pie filling. It might be tempting to use fresh pumpkin for this autumn classic, however, avoid using the hob to boil the pumpkin and save 21p when cooking three pies – plenty for celebrating with family and friends.

4. MAC CHEESE

Although macaroni cheese is traditionally made with a white sauce or roux, there are great recipes for a one-pot mac 'n' cheese – boil the pasta in milk and allow the starch to thicken the milk into a sauce, then add cheese. By keeping all the ingredients in one pan on the hob and using five-minute quick-cook pasta, you can save 24p per four servings. Simply dig in once it's ready on the hob and skip the oven, and you'll save a further 11p on top.

5. CHILLI CON CARNE

Keep the cold at bay with a warming chilli con carne and save 36p by cooking rice in a microwave steamer rather than on the hob for your weekly chilli night during the winter – there's much less chance of burning the bottom too!

6. SHEPHERD'S PIE

Let the meat thaw in the fridge overnight so it's ready to cook the next day and pop the potatoes in the microwave until they're soft enough to mash – without using the hob, you can save £1.20 on your winter supply of shepherd's pie.

7. CASSEROLE

Whether you're using beef, lamb or pork,



Tuck into microwave beans on toast once a week over the winter months and you could save 36p



Cook a jacket potato in the microwave and save around 32p



Hot chocolate is cheap, cheery and delicious

cook casserole in a slow cooker over several hours, rather than in the oven. Not only is the meat guaranteed to be melt-in-the-mouth tender, but you'll also be saving 40p. Help the meat to cook even more quickly and use less energy by cutting into smaller pieces.

8. SOUP

Use a lid to trap heat when making soup. It maintains the same level of boiling without having the hob turned up as high, and can save up to 3% in energy costs per pot.

To save even more energy, try making simple soups in the microwave, such as a warming chicken noodle soup – this can save up to 50p for a family serving, versus making it on the hob.

9. ROAST DINNER

Pre-boil potatoes before roasting them. Or better still, pop them in the microwave for five minutes before crisping up in the oven and cut energy costs by 75%. Cooking a roast chicken in a pressure cooker takes around half the time compared to in an

oven, and it's especially good for extra succulence. If you like it crispy, simply put it in the oven for around 15 minutes at the end.

10. HOT CHOC

Hot chocolate is a low cost and energy-efficient way to warm up on a cold winter night.

Using hot chocolate powder and boiling only the water you need in the kettle can cost as little as 1p in energy. If you like it milky, boiling milk on the hob will cost just 2p.

Early birds have it all wrapped up by December

Have you got your Christmas shopping all wrapped up? For some people, it could pay off to head to the shops early.

While you may not feel in the festive mood just yet, new research suggests many people started stocking up for Christmas well before shops started putting up their displays.

Nearly one in four (23%) of us had started our Christmas shopping by September or earlier, a survey from VoucherCodes.co.uk has found.

And with worries about stretching the budget over the festive season, many have been thinking ahead.

Just over two in five (42%) people have been putting a bit of cash away every month throughout the year to be able to afford Christmas.

Many are so well prepared that 23% expect to have the festive shopping all wrapped up by the first week of December.

Although there are always some who like to leave it to the last minute – with nearly one in 10 (9%) confessing they will be making a last-minute dash on Christmas Eve to finish buying their presents.

It's clear that cost pressures are on many people's minds when it comes to Christmas shopping habits – and with much discussion taking place in recent weeks about rising prices, it may well pay for some shoppers to plan ahead.

Nearly one in four (22%) people surveyed were concerned about the impact the festive season could have on their wallet.

And it's little wonder when, according to the research, households are typically expected to spend £780 on Christmas, including gifts, food and drink, and cards and decorations.

Many plan to take advantage of shopping bonanzas to help them save money.

The survey among more than 2,000 people found that 22% of people are planning to shop on Black Friday (November 25), while 17% plan to splash the cash on Cyber Monday (November 28).

But before joining the stampede, it may well be worth doing your research before these shopping days – to check out whether what's billed as a "bargain" really is worth it.

Technology is also playing a big role in shoppers' quests to scout out the best deals this year.

Nearly half (49%) of those surveyed will be shopping online this Christmas, with nearly a third (29%) planning to make festive purchases on their smartphones.

Those planning on hitting the high street are also doing their homework online first, with nearly one in five (19%) using mobile technology to find deals on-the-go.

The research suggests women are savvier than men when it comes to comparing prices on the high street with those online, with 21% of female Christmas shoppers admitting to searching for deals online while in-store, compared to just 16% of men.

There are also signs that rising prices may make this year particularly tricky for Christmas bargain hunters.

Official figures recently showed the consumer price index (CPI) rate of inflation accelerated to 1% in September – the highest level seen in nearly two years.

Economists have warned the weak pound could feed through to further price increases at the tills in the coming months. This has led some commentators to suggest that this year, it really may pay off to do your Christmas shopping early.

GET YOUR FESTIVE FINANCES ON TRACK

We're now more than half way through the tax year – and with the expense of the festive season ahead, it's a good time to check whether your savings are on track.

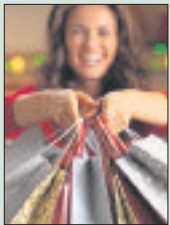
Here are some tips from Clare Francis, savings and investments director at Barclays:

:: Even putting aside small amounts can help when it comes to saving.

:: Don't overlook your ISA allowance. The ISA allowance for the 2016/2017 tax year is £15,240. And the new personal savings allowance (PSA) means basic rate taxpayers can now earn £1,000 of savings interest a year without having to pay any tax on it. The PSA for higher rate taxpayers is £500.

:: It's important to have some cash savings even if you are happy to take the additional risk of stock market investments.

:: Set savings goals. They could range from a "rainy day" fund to life events such as a house deposit or retirement.



Great ideas for gifts to delight the gardener

As the festive season draws near, it's time to think about gifts for the gardener. Hannah Stephenson digs out some of the best

GREEN-FINGERED friends and family may have precision tools, pampering presents or ornamental must-haves on their Christmas wish lists, and indeed there is the perfect gift for gardeners out there – you just have to find it.

:: Plant theatre: Stage a spectacular display of your favourite flowers with this plant theatre made from aged metal, which will distress beautifully over time. No assembly required, the theatre just folds out and can be folded away for easy storage if required (£95, [www.miafleur.com](#)).

:: Dutch plant pots: Put pizzazz back into your patio with these eye-catching blue Dutch plant pots made from glazed clay. They sit as easily indoors as they do outside (set of three, £32.95, [www.miafleur.com](#)).

:: Snazzy wellies: Floral print ankle wellies are ideal for stylish gardeners who want to show their feminine side. These are fully waterproof with soft wool lining for extra warmth and comfort. (£19.99, [www.mountainware-house.com](#))

:: Hip-trug: This new innovation can store debris, garden produce or light tools, clipping easily to a belt, pocket or waistband, leaving both hands free for gardening jobs (from £9.95, [www.burgonandball.com](#)).

:: Lovely labels: Add style to your allotment, vegetable plot, kitchen garden or greenhouse plants with these slate-style blackboard labels, which are actually made from wood but look like traditional slate. Each pack of 10 Blackboard Labels comes with a weather-proof white pencil for easy marking of names, varieties and other information. You can rub out the details at the end of the season and start again (£7.95, [www.har-rodhorticultural.com](#)).

:: Razor hoe: This is one of the most useful tools on the block, especially if you tend to do your weeding on your knees. It draws through the soil towards you, chopping and removing weeds in its path and prises stubborn weeds from between block paving (£14.95, [www.burgonandball.com](#)).

:: The garden chair: Fit for a gardening king or queen, this beautifully crafted redwood chair will create an eye-catching focal point for any garden space and can be engraved either with one of the standard options such as 'Head Gardener' or 'The Boss', or with a personalised engraving (£570, [www.theposhshedcompany.co.uk](#)).

:: Corsica doorstopper: This clever container features a slot for a patio door, to stop it slamming. Fill it with your favourite plants to camouflage the fact it's actually an ideal door stop. Comes in eight colours, white, terra, taupe, liver, black, cherry, lime green, vintage blue and mint. (£14.99, from garden centres. For stockist details, visit [www.elho.com](#))

:: Discovery box: New from The Seed Pantry, this monthly subscription grow club discovery box is designed for those who are keen to grow food and flowers at home, delivered at the right time to grow. You receive monthly boxes of your own choice of seeds, bulbs or plants and grow guides. Gifting options will be available for three, six and 12 month subscriptions (£12.99 per month, first box £6.99, [www.seedpantry.co.uk](#)).

:: Man-size barbecue: Now enjoy barbecuing on-the-go with this Wild & Wolf portable barbecue in a lightweight mini suitcase. Comes emblazoned with the words: "The Adventure Begins" (£54.95, [www.blooms-burystore.com](#)).

:: Flower candle: The ultimate pampering gift when you're soaking in the bath after a long day's digging is this beautifully scented Jo Malone Peony & Moss charity candle, of which 75% of all proceeds goes to support its charity garden projects nationwide (£44, [www.jomalone.co.uk](#)).

:: Christmas Scent: Bring garden fragrance into the home with this diffuser which will fill your room with the aroma of zesty orange with a dash of cinnamon, nutmeg and clove to create a banquet of enchanting, spicy fragrances (£25, at [www.heylandandwhittle.co.uk](#)).

:: Tough axe to follow: Want a real wood fire over the festive season? Fiskars, a leading Finnish producer of exclusive quality gardening tools, offers a range of Next Generation axes to make wood chopping easier (from £44.99, from garden centres, DIY stores and online, or visit [www.fiskars.co.uk/support/store-locator](#)).



Kalanchoe (Saxifragales Crassulaceae Kalanchoe) has bright flowers

Bright blooms available at all times of the year

BEST OF THE BUNCH – Kalanchoe
THIS pretty houseplant used to be bought as a Christmas-flowering gift plant, but now it is available in flower all year round.

K. blossfeldiana, a succulent native to Madagascar, is popular during the festive season because of its clusters of colourful blooms which can last around six to eight weeks, in colours of white, yellow, orange, lilac, pink or red blooms, borne in large heads on 30cm-high plants with succulent deep green leaves. Named varieties include 'Bali' and 'Vesuvius', which are both red, and the orange-flowered 'Tarantella'. Kalanchoes like bright light, but not direct sunlight, so avoid placing them on very sunny windowsills. They need an average warmth of around 50C in winter. The most common mistake is to overwater them, so let the surface soil dry out between watering and they should last you through the festive season and beyond.

GOOD ENOUGH TO EAT – Horseradish
THIS fiery vegetable makes the horseradish sauce that goes so well with roast beef and, in more recent times, has become popular in mayonnaise to accompany smoked salmon dishes.

It's easy to grow, but is best cultivated in a bottomless bucket as it's an invasive perennial with deep roots which regrow when they are broken off. Buy the plants from specialist herb nurseries, dig a hole to house the bottomless bucket, leaving 2.5cm of the bucket above the surface so the roots are contained. Refill the bucket with compost and push a cane into the soil to make a hole, then feed a single long, thin root into it, leaving the tip at ground level. Plant three roots 60cm apart in a triangular shape for a good clump. You need to wait two years before collecting your first crop.

WHAT TO DO THIS WEEK
1. Put a floating ball or a piece of polystyrene in ponds to stop the water freezing.
2. Stake Brussels sprouts with sturdy canes and remove dead or dying leaves around the bottom of plants.
3. Do some weeding if the ground is soft enough, to give you a head start for spring.
4. Fill border gaps with new perennials.
5. Move plants which don't work in their current spot while they are dormant, but the ground is still workable.

Find the right tree for your home and budget

By Hannah Stephenson

IF you've dusted off your tree stand, got your baubles out and are surrounded by sparkling tinsel, it must be almost time to put the Christmas tree up.

Garden centres generally start stocking trees towards the end of November, while The British Christmas Tree Growers Association (BCTGA) recommends getting them from December 1 onwards. It seems the middle of the festive season, the third Sunday after Advent (December 11) is a good compromise.

The fresher the tree, the more likely it is to last through the festive season without dropping its needles or looking a little tired.

While the most common type of tree is still the Nordmann fir – which accounts for 80% of trees sold – there are some that might better suit your available space and budget.

"Bear in mind the size of the room and the weight of the tree," says David Mitchell, plant buyer for Wyevale Garden Centres. "A lot of Christmas trees are sold by height, so make sure you've got the roof space for it and don't end up having to cut a section off the top."

"Some trees have a lighter structure. We sell a Swedish-style Nordmann which is lighter. We select the trees in the field and prune them to have a lighter feel, which suits a lot of customers. They are good if you want to experiment with larger decorations or you want to see light coming through the tree. They have more of a layered structure, and they are cheaper than the denser trees."

The four main types of tree on offer this year are Nordmann fir, Fraser fir, Noble fir and Norway spruce, each of which has its own characteristics.

:: **Nordmann fir (Abies nordmanniana)**

The most popular tree, it won't drop its needles for the duration of the festive season and people love it because of its dense branches, uniform shape and good variety of sizes. Expect to pay from about £20 upwards, depending on size.

:: **Fraser fir (Abies fraseri)**

This is ideal for those with limited space, who want a real Christmas tree. It's a slim tree, so you're less likely to brush past it and knock off decorations in a smaller room, but it also has a great shape and fresh citrus scent, and its dark olive-green needles don't drop. It's likely to be more expensive than the Nordmann, and there won't be as many available as it's a more difficult tree to grow commercially, says Mitchell.

:: **Noble fir (Abies procera)**

Consumers buy this tree primarily for its blue-hued needle colour and rich fragrance. It's non-drop, but is unlikely to be as uniformly shaped as the Nordmann. This tree is ideal for individuals who don't conform to conventional shapes and sizes of trees.

:: **Norway spruce (Picea abies)**

This is the traditionalist's tree. It may shed its needles, but what it loses in lon-



Buy your tree fresh – get it early before the trees have been left standing in the garden centre a week or longer



Consider how much room you have for a tree before you buy

gevity it gains in scent. It's a good tree if you're putting it up last minute, or at least closer to Christmas, because it won't last as long as the more expensive non-drop trees.

Alternatives

There are twiggly alternatives – if you haven't space, decorate containerised olive or pyramid-trained bay trees or standard holly bushes and put them outside your front door or on a balcony, anywhere outside where you get a good view of them.

Ideally, buy from a local grower. Visit the British Christmas Tree Growers Asso-

ciation website ([www.bctga.co.uk](#)) to check out members locally. Alternatively, good garden centres should have plenty of trees from which to choose. Wyevale ([www.wyevalegardencentres.co.uk](#)) sources 95% of its trees from the UK and Ireland.

Tree Tips

David Mitchell offers the following tips to keep your tree going through the festive season:

:: Buy it fresh – he recommends getting it early before the trees have been left standing in the garden centre a week or longer.



The most common type of tree is the Nordmann fir

When you bring it home, cut a couple of centimetres off the trunk and dunk it in a bucket of water, leaving it outside until you need it.

:: Buy from a retailer who will remove it from its netting. You want to see the shape of it before you buy. Sometimes a micro-climate builds up within trees which have been netted for any length of time, which can make trees drop their needles earlier.

:: Put the tree into a stand which can hold water. Water it regularly.

:: Try to keep the tree in the cool and definitely away from direct heat.



Take a break from the festive chaos with a garden trip



The Palmhouse, Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh



Croome Park, Worcestershire, is worth a visit

World-class hotels await you in Music City Seattle



Fly to Seattle from London in under ten hours

SPOTLIGHT ON SEATTLE

Currency: US Dollar

Brief overview: For a while, Seattle was Music City. Like Nashville, New Orleans and Memphis, it became inextricably linked to rock'n'roll. Seattle is the city that gave us Jimi Hendrix and Nirvana. So stick that in your pipe, Liverpool.

You only gave us one-and-a-half bands – Cast being the half – Seattle gave us two. And we're not counting Pearl Jam, Soundgarden, Alice In Chains, Death Cab For Cutie or Fleet Foxes, though we probably should.



The seaport city is the largest in the state of Washington and lies close to the Canadian and USA border. It's one of the USA's more relaxed and laid-back cities, a place that doesn't rush nor take itself too seriously. Rich in history, Seattle was once a timber town that experienced numerous periods of boom and bust.

A gold rush, Great Depression and prosperity brought about by Boeing's manufacture of aircraft and the dot.

com boom have also shaped its modern era.

Where to stay: Seattle offers great, world class hotels and the Four Seasons is arguably the best. Expect sleek, polished service with local artwork on display. The Fairmont Olympic is similarly classy while others of a high standard include Hotel 1000, Inn at the Market, Hotel Monaco, Pan Pacific, The Arctic Club, Alexis Seattle, The Heathman, Hotel Andra, Sorrento and Hyatt at Olive 8, which was designed to be as ecologically-friendly as its possible to be.

What to do: You can whizz round Seattle in a couple of days if you really want to, though taking time to explore is a far better option. Either way, a list of sights that ought to be on your itinerary includes Space Needle, the landmark spire with city vistas. Pike Place Market offers great food and flowers while the Experience Music Project Museum is a revelation. Other points of interest include the Woodland Park Zoo, Pacific Space Centre, Museum of Flight, Chihuly Garden and Glass, Lake Union, Ballard Locks and Olympic Sculpture Park.

What to eat/drink: From the city that gave us world class coffee and Starbucks, try curried beef horn bown at Mee Sum Pastry, fried chicken at Heaven Sent, daily specials at Il Corvo, chicken teriyaki at Nasai Teriyaki, fresh oysters at The Walrus and the Carpenter, grilled cheese at Beecher's, bittersweet cookies at Delancey, a Tokyo classic at Katsu Burger and a Seattle dog at Stands Around Seattle.

How to get there: Expect to find direct budget flights from London to New Orleans from around £400. The flight from London Heathrow to Louis Armstrong Airport takes under 10 hours.

Winter gardens are a breath of fresh air

TAKE a break from Christmas shopping, list-making and party planning by enjoying the best of winter gardens nationwide.

If you haven't celebrated Capability Brown's 300th anniversary this year, there's still time to visit his majestic landscapes, while the National Trust offers a wealth of winter wonderlands and the RHS stages a range of horticultural events.

Here's just a few of the best gardens to give you space to think before Christmas takes over...

Dingle Nurseries and Garden, Frochas, Welshpool, Powys

This family-run business has devoted a 4.5-acre area for a spectacular RHS partner garden taking in the mid-Wales rolling hills and is famed for its colour-themed and unusual planting. At this time of year, head for the lake to admire the brightly-stemmed dogwoods and trees with eye-catching bark, including eucalyptus and superb birches, as well as the paper bark maple (*Acer griseum*). It also has great collections of conifers and shrubs, including witch-hazel and daphne (dinglenurseriesandgarden.co.uk; 01938 555 145).

Croome Court, Worcester

Take in a guided tour of the gardens and parkland Capability Brown designed with stunning views over the Malverns at Croome Court. Guided tours run until December 31, with temples, follies and statues around every corner. If you want to explore on your own, downloadable walks, including a winter welly walk to Pirton Castle, are available from www.nationaltrust.org.uk.

RHS Garden Harlow Carr, Harrogate, North Yorkshire

Adorned with daphnes, witch hazels, birch trees and maples, the striking stem colours and variety of forms, textures and breath-taking scents make this one of the largest and oldest concentrations of winter horticulture in the north of England. Kids can get involved in the festive garden detective trail, while Magic of Christmas days offer family fun to get you in the festive spirit. Celebrating the 10th anniversary

WALKS

By Hannah Stephenson

of its Winter Walk, some 5,000 irises have been planted and will bloom in early spring (www.rhs.org.uk/gardens/harlow-carr).

Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh

If the weather's too cold for a walk, take refuge in the amazing glasshouses where 10 different climatic zones display stately palms, stunning orchids, architectural ferns, a collection of plants that underlines their importance to our everyday existence and plants from some of the steamiest jungles and driest deserts on planet earth (www.rbge.org.uk).

Bodnant Garden, Conwy

Bodnant's winter garden has now been open for almost four years. Discover colour-stemmed birches and enjoy the scent of winter shrubs such as hamamelis, daphne and sarcococca. Highlights after Christmas include bright bergenias and bulbs such as snowdrops, iris, cyclamen and crocus (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/bodnant-garden).

Wallington, Northumberland

Leave the formality of the house behind this winter and explore the wonderful 18th-century pleasure ground waiting for you in the woods at Wallington. Follow the growing winter trail and take in the seasonal planting through the East Wood, with trees, shrubs and plants showcasing coloured and textured bark and winter berries. Discover the mini-lake covered in a sprinkling of frost and the enchanting Walled Garden. The grounds at Wallington are even open on Christmas Day, and are the perfect place to walk off your festive dinner (www.nationaltrust.org.uk/wallington).

Trentham Gardens, near Stoke-on-Trent, Staffs

Top designer Piet Oudolf's Rivers of Grass is a sight to behold in winter. The gardens are open throughout the holiday, apart from Christmas Day itself. Book a skating session on their lakeside rink (trentham.co.uk; 01782 646646).



Colourful planting to help raise the spirits of visitors to Bodnant Winter Garden

Soaking up history with paddle along heritage trail



Life is leisurely on the Heritage Canoe Trail

A HERITAGE Canoe Trail, offering a route through Stoke-on-Trent and the Potteries to Froghall Wharf on the edge of the Peak District, is now available for paddlers of all ages and abilities.

Launched in September, it has been created as part of Stoke-on-Trent being named the UK European City of Sport 2016, and features special markers to guide canoeists along the 20-mile canal-based route.

The trail also follows hot-on-the-heels of Stoke-on-Trent born canoe slalom athlete Joe Clarke winning Olympic gold at Rio 2016.

Broken down into five short routes along the Trent and Mersey and Caldon canals, it starts from Westport Lake in Burslem, the so-called Mother Town of

The Potteries. The first 2.5-mile section includes Middleport Pottery, "home" of Burleigh ware and the BBC TV Great Pottery Throw Down, and continues to the city centre of Hanley.

Fittingly enough, Stoke-on-Trent and The Potteries is the place where the canal's most enthusiastic promoter, Josiah Wedgwood, and his fellow manufacturers and businessmen planned a canal well beyond the scale of anything that had ever been seen before.

Less than a mile from Westport is the site where Wedgwood himself broke the soil to start the canal's construction, 250 years ago.

Integral to the success of the Trent and Mersey Canal was the Caldon Canal, which is now also a part of the Heritage

Canoe Trail. The trail along the two canals can be enjoyed in several ways: short trips lasting around one to two hours; longer trips that take most of the day; or, for the very fit, longer trips that can be completed in one go, or over multi-day sessions.

The trail also shows places to visit along the way, including Middleport Pottery and Café, Emma Bridgewater Factory and Café, Churnet Valley Steam Railway, and numerous historic canal-side pubs.

The trail as a whole is also well-signposted by new orange and white route plaques.

The online link to the trail can be found at <http://www.visitstoke.co.uk/see-do/canals.aspx>

Harking back to the write stuff in home office

ANTIQUES AND COLLECTIBLES

with John Ridgway of Perry & Phillips



WITH the advent of computers in the not too distant past, home offices changed dramatically, becoming much more 'functional' than the studies of previous years.

And usually far less comfortable, it has to be said, with wires everywhere, hard drives you either fell over or stubbed your toes on and computer desks you couldn't actually sit at and so on.

But thankfully, and ironically due to advanced computer technology, we can once more establish the traditional study with vintage items – which is great for the increasing number of people who now work from home.

Because of neat little flat screens, laptops and tablets we are able to bring back the lovely roll-top desk, which was sadly not at all popular over the past decade thanks to its shape and size.

This also goes for the small pretty vintage desks with red or green leather tops which can also be used in the modern home office.

We sell a lot of really nice vintage desks in the sale-room and although prices vary it is possible to pick one up for a very reasonable sum.

And, because there is much more room on our desks now, we can actually furnish them with vintage writing stands – I know we don't especially use ink any more, but they still look great!

There are some beautiful antique book-cases available. Look out for the Victorian ones with leaded glass fronts but check the panes are undamaged before you buy.

Vintage cupboards and chests are often more roomy inside than their contemporary counterparts and you can still pick up old filing cabinets.

Smaller items, such as envelopes, paper clips, scissors, notebooks and so on can be stored in a deed or filing box.

Pens and pencils look really nice in an old jug or small vase, an angle-poise lamp on a desk will provide some ambient lighting and you may even be able to find and old stapler.

Depending on space, you could have a small vintage sofa or a couple of upholstered chairs to complete the look.

Add to all this some period prints for the walls, maybe even a vintage telephone, a couple of old rugs and you will have re-created a cosy, old-fashioned study which is extremely peaceful to work in!

Perry and Phillips Auctioneers hold sales of antiques and collectibles on the first Tuesday of each month.

Valuation days, for sale items only, are held every Wednesday at the Mill Street saleroom in Low Town, Bridgnorth, from 10am until 4pm.



No escape from the abundance of branding



Brand are all around us, every day

WHILE you are sitting reading this article, glance around you and take note of how many logos you can see. My list includes HP Toshiba, Asda, Apple, Sellotape, Wilko, Boots, Sky, Crocs, Ikea, to name but a few.

Our lives are inundated with product icons designed to grab our attention in a crowded marketplace and some familiar without any use of words to define the item such as Nike, Macdonalds, Chanel and most of the car companies.

A logo identifies a business by a graphic representation, branding however is the complete corporate image and consistency of the way all its elements are used is hugely important to ensure we unknowingly recognise and remember. It is incredibly difficult to create the right image, you can never please everyone and it is essential the icons used are not too contemporary or too old fashioned so that they will last a lifetime, the best are simple, clear and honest and best not altered once the decision to use them has been made, and so not diluting the effect.

Today every new company sets up with a logo, sometimes at great expense using

STYLE FOCUS

with Janet Timmis



graphic designers, sometimes just using a much loved doodle. Our ancestors named businesses after themselves, there was rarely an icon and the description of their trade was included, e.g. John Smith, Butcher or Jones and Sons, Ironmonger. Today it is the money spent on advertising that advises us of the nature of a business. The money spent also makes businesses very protective. An icon (or Mark) can be registered as a trademark (sign, design or expression) and the owner can then pursue legal action for any trademark infringement. An unregistered trademark will be defined by the TM mark and a R in a circle defines a registered trademark. The first logo to be trademarked was the red Bass brewery triangle in 1876. There is even a board game which is based around recognising familiar logos. I think we would all be surprised at

just how many we know. We are surrounded by them. On the cars we see daily, our food packaging, supermarkets, clothing and accessories, road signage, sweets and treats, magazines and newspapers, the list goes on and on.

Colour is extremely important, we naturally respond to it and it sends subliminal messages to our brain and in its base terms relates to our survival, red lights mean stop and often we define the safety of foods by the colour. We also accept widely colour emotions red for action and passion, pink for femininity, calming blue, cheerful yellow, environmental green and technical black.

The newest trends in company symbols for clothing are the use of the designers name in their own handwriting and shops are reverting to very simplified words in clean un-complicated fonts, Primark, New Look and TKMaxx are examples from the high street.

When you are out and about take note of the abundance of branding, symbols, adverts and product placement engulfing our outlook.

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Research by Tesco says that last year mums and dads spent an average of £294 buying Christmas gifts for the kids, but this year 66 per cent are unsure what to buy

Strike the right balance with gifts you can afford



Stick to your guns – and your budget

WITH TV screens currently bouncing from one sparkling Christmas advert to another, parents are under increasing pressure to buy the biggest and best gifts for their excited children.

But although studies show that last year mums and dads spent an average of £294 buying Christmas gifts for the kids, this year two thirds (66 per cent) of parents are unsure what to buy – often because youngsters are constantly changing their minds about what they want, regardless of what was on their letter to Santa.

Research by Tesco found just under half of parents with children aged under 16 years couldn't correctly guess the main present choice of their child, and a third have bought a toy their child didn't like in the past.

Child psychologist Dr Sam Wass, who appeared on Channel 4's The Secret Life Of 4, 5 And 6 Year Olds, says there's often a 'disconnect' between what parents think their child wants and what the child actually desires.

So to help unsure parents make the best Christmas buys for their kids, he suggests:

Size matters

From a selection of identically-wrapped presents of varying sizes, Tesco found boys

By Lisa Salmon

tended to go for the biggest presents, and girls picked the smallest.

"If you're stuck buying a gift for a boy, our research suggests bigger is always better. Smaller items were favoured by the girls as smaller gifts tend to have more sentimental value, which it seems is more valuable to girls than boys," explains Wass.

Versatility

Children often get bored of gifts that only have a single function. Avoid this by picking a gift that's more versatile and lets their creativity and imagination flourish, such as building bricks like LEGO.

Playtime

Almost all children need to run around and want toys that are fast, exciting and physical, like a scooter or a football. But they also need toys which help them calm down towards the end of the day, such as a book. "Choose a toy that matches when they normally spend the most time playing to get the most out of your gift," advises Wass.

Volume control

Loud noises and flashing lights are exciting, but Wass warns: "For your own sanity, make sure you check the volume before you buy. Buying a gift that they love and you hate is a recipe for disaster."

Shared fun

Research suggests children benefit from spending time on shared tasks with their parents. "This can be a great opportunity to spend some time with your child, based around common interests," says Wass. "Give yourself a helping hand and pick a gift that you're interested in too."

Pester Power

But what if your kids do know what they want and won't stop pestering you for it? New research by Asda Money shows a quarter of those buying children gifts feel pressure to buy presents they can't afford.

And while 26 per cent said the pressure comes from the kids, who want what their friends have or what they've seen on TV, 38 per cent said they felt pressure from themselves to buy better gifts than last year, and one in 10 admitted they're trying to compete with parents of other children to buy the biggest and best presents.

This pressure inevitably results in overspending, with 24 per cent last year saying they went over budget.

Psychologist Dr Linda Papadopoulos says it's important children understand there's not a direct link between asking and immediately getting. "Be sure to stick to your guns. The more you respond to pester power, the more they know it works."



There are lots of things to consider when buying bathroom taps

Top tips for getting it right with taps

BUYING bath and basin taps isn't necessarily as straightforward as you might think – it's easy to make the wrong choice, but how do you make the right one?

1. There are lots of things to consider when buying bathroom taps, not least the style. The different elements of your bathroom should go together, so if you have a period-style room, you need classic taps to suit that period, and if you've gone down the contemporary route, you need sleek, modern taps. Try the taps with the bathroom suite to check they're the right style and size – it's especially important that the basin tap's in proportion to the basin. Most bathroom taps are chrome these days, but other finishes are available.

2. Don't forget ease of use, especially for the youngest and oldest members of the family, who may have difficulty operating some designs. "You'll use these taps every day, so think about how you'll interact with them," says Simon Browning from Mira Showers. "Make sure the control feels precise and the taps are easy to use." You don't need to spend a fortune to get good taps, but it can be a false economy to buy really cheap ones because a tap has working parts and those parts can fail if they're poor quality. If you soon end up having to get the taps repaired or replaced, you'll wish you'd spent more on a product designed to last. "You can judge the

quality of a tap by the warranty that comes with it, as well as aesthetics: look for perfect symmetry and flat lines on the edges of the tap," says Browning.

3. Mixers taps, which only have one spout, are a popular choice and mix hot and cold water inside the tap, but some people prefer separate hot and cold taps (often called pillar taps). If your bath has two tap holes, you're not confined to having separate taps – most bath mixers are designed for two holes. However, not all baths come pre-drilled with taps holes – to avoid drilling them, or if the bath isn't designed to have tap holes, use wall-mounted or floor-standing taps.

4. There's nothing worse than a tap that's more a dribble than a deluge, so do consider your home's water system before you buy. "This tends to be more important if you have a low-pressure water system – if the tap isn't suitable and the water flow is poor, it will take a long time to fill a bath," says Browning. "Improvements in technology can not only make taps work better, but also improve their longevity and ease of cleaning."

5. Good water pressure is especially important for bath-shower mixer taps. These taps are a cost-effective way to have an over-bath shower because you need bath taps anyway, so why not pay a bit more for taps that connect to a shower head and hose? Bath-shower mixers are useful for washing your

hair, the dog and the bath itself, but good water pressure is needed for a good showering experience, so they can't always be used instead of a separate shower.

TOP PRODUCT

For a stunning statement in your smallest room, the Evolve range of taps from the Mira Showers Aspects Collection is a great choice. Beautifully designed and engineered, these lever taps are a minimalist's dream, with sleek, contemporary styling, clean lines and a smooth action. The range comes with a reassuring five-year guarantee and comprises both pillar and mixer taps for baths and basins (from £127.20 for Mira Evolve Basin Pillar Taps). Evolve taps are easy to install, easy to use – even with one or two fingers – and easy to clean thanks to integrated flow straighteners. What more do you need?

HOW-TO TIP

Dripping taps are not only annoying, they also waste water, which wastes money if you have a water meter. There's usually a quick fix, such as replacing a washer, but even basin plumbing like this can seem daunting if you're not an experienced DIYer. For novices, there's an excellent, easy-to-follow guide to fixing leaking taps on the Wickes website at www.wickes.co.uk/how-to-guides/kitchen-bathroom/fix-leaking-taps.

Tree-t yourself to new splash of festive decor

By Gabrielle Fagan

DECKING the halls is all very well, but the real focal point at Christmas is the tree, which makes a statement about your decor taste and seasonal style.

There are four top-of-the-tree looks to choose from this season, to ensure yours is festively fashionable and a star of the show...

ARCTIC CHIC

"The must-have look is modern minimalism – in other words, less is more – and that's made white trees and white lights this year's most popular choice," says Stephen Evans, managing director at Christmas Tree World.

"This is a sleek, fuss-free but magical setting and works brilliantly with blue decorations – they're a really strong trend. Combine with silver, grey and white for a Frozen or Narnia-inspired look. This cool palette brings a frosty sparkle to the home, but if this is a little too chilly for your taste, intersperse accents of gold and copper to warm up the theme."

Dive into Dobbies for brilliant blue baubles, including a Bauble With Green Leaf Tree, £3.99, and a retro-style Reflector Bauble, £4.99. Gisela Graham's Jewel Snowflake Decoration, £19.95, Harrods, will add that essential sparkle.

Peacocks are the season's favourite feathered friend and their tail designs feature on Very's Glass Peacock Christmas Tree Baubles, currently reduced to £9.99 from £14.99 for a set of three.

TARTAN TRADITIONAL

"This classic seasonal look is being shaken up this year, with a tartan twist," says Dobbies seasonal buyer, Kate Hepworth.

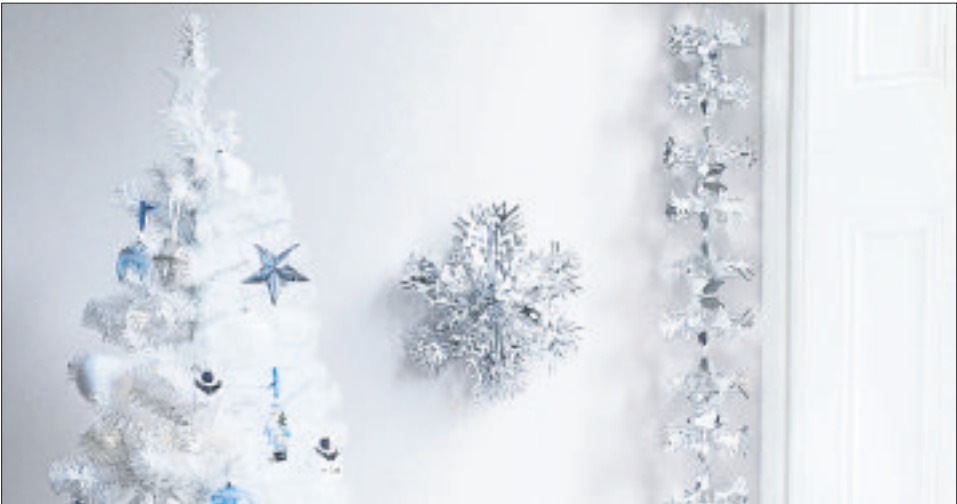
"Traditional style – particularly the pairing of red and green – is enduringly popular, but the accents change every season to give this theme a new injection of interest. By using plaid, we've aimed to ramp up the cosiness, and it's easy to tie this look into a room's decor theme, by accessorising with tartan throws and cushions.

"While stags are still running wild all over decor, and trees are no exception, they're starting to make way this year for owls, robins, reindeer, and even bear baubles."

Dobbies' super red and tartan bauble collection includes a red Bell Bauble With Berry Trim And Tartan Ribbon, £3.99, and a cheery red Glass Postbox, £4.99. Weyvale Garden Centres' handsome Bayberry Spruce Christmas Tree is £214, and they have an impressive collection of traditional/tartan decorations, available in stores. My favourites are a Tartan Stocking, £3.49; Wooden Sledge With Lights, £8.99; Red Berry Ball, £2.99, and Large Glass Ball With Red Poinsettia, £14.99.

SHIMMER & SHINE

People are lavishing more and more care and attention on decorating their trees, so they're an eye-catching talking point in a room.



Go completely white for a magical, winter wonderland setting inspired by Frozen and Narnia



The Artic look is all about modern minimalism



Make a statement about your taste and style

Metallic finishes always impress and attractively capture the light. Silver is always a contemporary choice, although there's a real growth in the popularity of more antiqued silver and vintage baubles. Dobbies have an unusual Clock Face Bauble in gold or silver (£4.99), which is an example of the trend. It encapsulates the fashionable style of a mix of shabby chic and Victoriana.

Gold's still strong for decorations, with rose gold featuring – but champagne gold is taking over because it's glamorous and

sophisticated, and suits more gentle, subtle schemes. Bright, shiny gold is still strong for traditional themes.

NORDIC STYLE

"I love a simple, country-style look inspired by Scandinavian style, which emphasises the natural beauty of the tree foliage and uses a pared-back approach to decorations," enthuses Hepworth.

"To achieve this, use clear glass, white, or silver decorations, which will conjure a feeling of snow-laden landscape, or play up

the natural theme with green baubles.

"Accessorise around the tree with lanterns, wooden candle holders, and chunky cream knits for throws and cushions, and maybe wreaths and garlands of mistletoe and holly. The beauty of this interpretation is that it's so versatile, and can look pure and elegant or rustic and log cabin."

Marks & Spencer's collection of green baubles is perfect for this style, and includes a Floral Droplet Bauble, £5, and a Glass Acorn Bauble, both £5 each.



Tartan always looks good on a traditional tree



Embrace Scandi style with a more natural theme

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Pilot and Titan explore strange new worlds in Respawn and EA's Titanfall 2 – and try to survive in them

Video game titans battle it out with action franchises

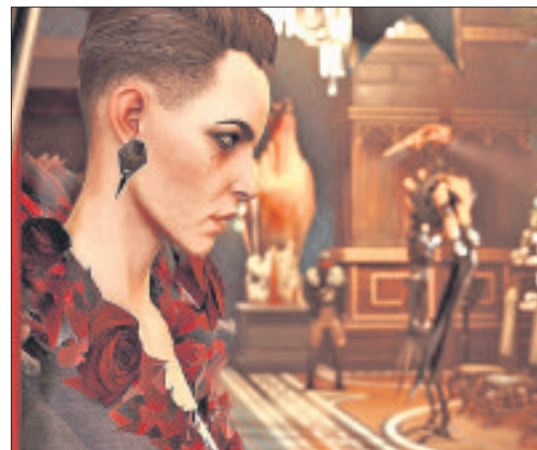
GAMERS have a better than ever choice of action games after the major companies surpassed themselves by literally unleashing their big guns in readiness for the season of goodwill – and console carnage – to all men (and women!).

Several of the top titles are sequels but, reversing the usual trend of diminishing returns, these games actually improve upon, or at least match, the originals.

Titanfall 2 is the follow-up to 2014's multi-award winner Titanfall and places you back in the thick of the action as a pilot in the galactic civil war between the Militia and the IMC. You can call upon a Titan, a hulking cross between a Transformers-like robot and a walking tank.

The single player campaign is shorter but more exciting than the original, with you as rookie pilot Jack, trapped behind enemy lines on a hostile alien planet after a mission goes badly wrong.

It is in multi-player that developers Respawn have really pulled out all the stops with strange new worlds, more powerful weapons and bigger, better Titans for when the robots get ready to rumble. The whole experience has been upgraded. The rocket-powered grappling hook is likely to be a favourite innovation, letting you soar through the sci-fi landscapes like Spiderman.



Why why why Aunt Delilah? The witch grabs the throne in Dishonored 2

Steampunk

Dishonored 2 takes fans of 2012 stealth hit Dishonored back to Dunwall and the Empire of the Isles. It's 15 years after the events of the original game and Empress Emily Kaldwin is now ruling with the help of her father Corvo Attano, Dishonored's hero. She is usurped by a witch-like aunt and you must then choose to play as Emma or Corvo for the rest of the game.

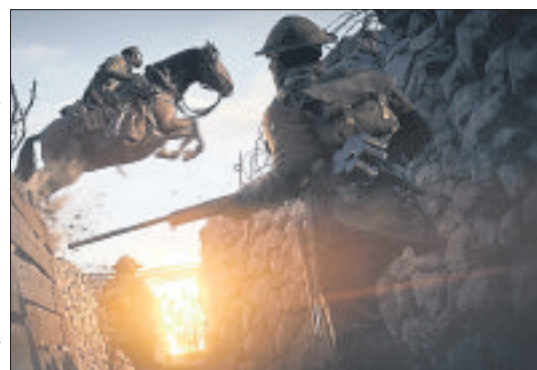
It's an action-packed sequel with new supernatural abilities to discover and use, set in a superbly realised pseudo-Victorian steampunk world. Is it better than the original? Maybe not, but it matches it for thrills and imagination. When a game was this popular, more of a good thing is welcome.

Battlefield 1 is actually a prequel, going back to the First World War to reboot the popular war game franchise. Most non-gamers probably think you have to suspend your maturity as soon as you press play on a Battlefield or Call Of Duty game. But, amid all the slaughter, Battlefield 1 actually has thoughtful moments. Just moments.

In the first scenes, when you wake up again and again in the trenches, overwhelmed by the Kaiser's hordes, the game drives home the message that many soldiers didn't stand a chance. One skirmish ends with you facing a lone German soldier, and both of you decide to drop your weapon. Point made, a huge world of war opens up with choices of campaign ranging from the Western Front, to dogfights in the skies, war in the Alps, the Gallipoli campaign or the chance to fight alongside Lawrence of Arabia in the desert. Multi-player can involve up to 64 combatants.

If you are a Batman fan, Warner Bros' Batman: Return To Arkham is a treat. It packages together remastered versions of Arkham Asylum and Arkham City.

The Bat's twisted gothic world has never looked better as he confronts his most dangerous enemies, The Joker, Harley Quinn, Killer Croc, The Penguin, Bane and Poison Ivy, plus the unpredictable Catwoman. All these games are for older gamers and are available on a variety of platforms but were reviewed on Xbox One by Leon Burakowski.



A War Horse moment from Battlefield 1, the war game's reboot



The chokes on you Joker, says Batman, from Return To Arkham

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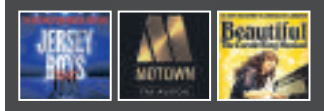
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Aladdin arrives – P 27



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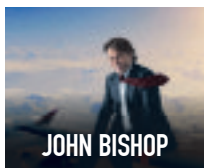
10 May 2017



7 Jun 2017



7 Jul 2017



10 - 12 Nov 2017

Matt Goss



Wednesday, 7pm

O2 Academy, Birmingham

Before joining his brother in a reunited Bros next year, Matt brings a festive version of his Rat Pack-inspired swing show honed in Las Vegas. See academymusicgroup.com/o2a academybirmingham

Ken Dodd



Saturday, 6.30pm

Civic Hall, Wolverhampton

The 89-year-old Liverpool comedian is celebrating more than 60 years in showbiz and promises a tattyfari Christmas Happiness Show...just don't expect to get home early. See wolvescivic.co.uk

Jools Holland and his R&B Orchestra



Wednesday & Thursday, 7.30pm

Symphony Hall, Birmingham

Boogie into Christmas with piano man Jools and his band, featuring Brum's own soul and reggae queen Ruby Turner, plus guest Pauline Black. See www.thsh.co.uk

Danielle de Niese



Monday, 1pm

Recital Hall, Birmingham

Conservatoire
Acclaimed as 'opera's coolest soprano', this is a rare intimate venue recital from the Australia-born diva who found fame at Glyndebourne. See thsh.co.uk

R&B, JAZZ, SOUL, BLUES & MOTOWN

Up4 The Downstroke

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Crossroads Blues Guests..

Steve Ajao Blues Giants Tomorrow, Tower Of Song, Birmingham, B30 3EL. Call 0121 486 1300

Jools Holland and His

Rhythm and Blues Orchestra Sun, Victoria Hall, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 3AD. Call 0844 871 7649

Trope

Sun, Glee Club Birmingham, The Arcadian Center, Birmingham, B5 4TD. Call 0871 472 0400

Jazz Tuesdays

Tue, Spotted Dog, Digbeth, Birmingham, B12 0NH. Call 0121 772 3822

The Urban Voodoo Machine

Wed, £14 - £16 The Robin 2, Bilston WV14 7LJ. Call 01902 401211

Live Jazz Broadcast V

Wed, £4 - £6 Birmingham Conservatoire, Birmingham City University, Edgbaston, B5 3HG. Call 0121 331 5901

ROCK & METAL

Jean Genie - The world's

No1 tribute to David Bowie Tonight, £10 - £12 The RoadHouse Birmingham, King's Norton, B30 3DZ. Call 0121 246 2273

The Bootleg Beatles

Tonight, Wulfrun Hall, Wolverhampton, WV1 1RD. Call 01902 552122

Reef

Tonight, £19 Central Station, Wrexham, LL11 1SN. Call 01978 358780

The ZZ Tops - The World's

#1 ZZ Top Tribute Band Tomorrow, £7 The RoadHouse Birmingham, King's Norton, B30 3DZ. Call 0121 246 2273

Levellers - Levelling the

Land 25th Anniversary Tour Tomorrow, O2 Academy Birmingham, B1 1DB. Call 0121 622 8250

Absolute Bowie - Celebrating the life of David Bowie

Tomorrow, O2 Academy Birmingham, B1 1DB. Call 0121 622 8250

Tearing it up for Xmas - a very special event in aid of the Scleroderma Society and Cancer Research UK

Sun, £5 The RoadHouse Birmingham, King's Norton, B30 3DZ. Call 0121 246 2273

Kula Shaker - The

20th Anniversary of K The O2 Institute, Digbeth, Birmingham, B5 6DY. Call 0121 643 0428

Lindisfarne - Christmas Special

Thu, £20 - £22 The Robin 2, Bilston WV14 7LJ. Call 01902 401211

The Stones

Thu, £15 Theatre on the Steps, Bridgnorth, WV16 4BD. Call 01746 766477

RAP & HIP HOP

Rizzle Kicks (cancelled)

Tonight, O2 Academy Birmingham, B1 1DB. Call 0121 622 8250

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70's v 80's One Stop Boogie!

XMAS PARTY NIGHT Tonight, £8 The River Rooms, Stourbridge, DY8 1JN. Call 01384 397 177 or 07986 577 661

The Sensational 60's Experience

Tonight - tomorrow, Malvern Theatres, WR14 3HB. Call 01684 892277

The Human League

Tomorrow, Barclaycard Arena, Brindleyplace, Birmingham, B1 2AA. Call 0121 780 4141

ABBA - Swede Dreamz - the

ultimate Christmas party! Tomorrow, £8 The River Rooms, Stourbridge, DY8 1JN. Call 01384 397 177 or 07986 577 661

Jason Donovan 2016: Ten Good Reasons & Greatest Hits Tour

Tue, Victoria Hall, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 3AD. Call 0844 871 7649 and Wed, £34.16 - £57.12 Malvern Theatres, WR14 3HB. Call 01684 892277

CLASSICAL

SOT Festival -

BBC Philharmonic Tonight, Victoria Hall, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 3AD. Call 0844 871 7649

University Camerata

Today, The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, B15 2TS. Call 0121 414 7333

Advent expectation - Lichfield

Cathedral Chorus concert Tomorrow, Lichfield Cathedral, WS13 7LD. Call 01543 306 100

An Enchanted Christmas

Tomorrow, St Hilda's Church, Warley Woods, Smethwick, B67 5NQ. Call 0121 429 1384

FOLK, COUNTRY & ACOUSTIC

Traditional Irish Music

Mon, Spotted Dog, Digbeth, Birmingham, B12 0NH. Call 0121 772 3822

Kate Rusby at Christmas

Mon, £15 - £21.50 Malvern Theatres, WR14 3HB. Call 01684 892277

The Dylan Project: Fifty

years after Blonde on Blonde Tue, £17.50 - £18.50 The Robin 2, Bilston WV14 7LJ. Call 01902 401211

Sing Political!

Wed, The Prince of Wales Moseley, Birmingham, B13 8EE. Call 0121 4494198

Seth Lakeman

Thu, Malvern Theatres, WR14 3HB. Call 01684 892277

COMEDY

RH Comedy Presents

Thu, The RoadHouse Birmingham, King's Norton, B30 3DZ. Call 0121 246 2273

Paul Foot: 'Tis a

Pity She's a Piglet Tonight, The Slade Rooms, Wolverhampton, WV1 1HP. Call 01902 552122

25 Years of Reeves & Mortimer:

the Poignant Moments Tonight, Barclaycard Arena, Brindleyplace, Birmingham, B1 2AA. Call 0121 780 4141

The Ken Dodd Christmas Happiness Show

Tomorrow, Wulfrun Hall, Wolverhampton, WV1 1RD. Call 01902 552122

Smash Entertainz

Sun, Glee Club Birmingham, The Arcadian Center, Birmingham, B5 4TD. Call 0871 472 0400

Seann Walsh: One For The Road

Tue, £14 Artrix, Bromsgrove, B60 1PQ. Call 01527 871580

Faulty Towers The Dining Experience

Tue - Thu, £50 Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Library of Birmingham, B1 2EP. Call 0121 236 4455

Comedy 42 Christmas Special

Thu, Lichfield Garrick, WS13 6HR. Call 01543 412121

THEATRE

Sister Act

Tonight - tomorrow, £33.60 - £44.80 Malvern Theatres, WR14 3HB. Call 01684 892277

The Nutcracker

Tonight - Tue, £19 Birmingham Hippodrome, B5 4TB. Call 0844 338 5000

Treasure Island

Tonight - Thu, Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Library of Birmingham, B1 2EP. Call 0121 236 4455

Keep Dancing

Tonight - tomorrow, New Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham, B5 4DS. Call 0844 338 5000

A Christmas Carol

Tonight - tomorrow, MAC, Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham, B12 9QH. Call 0121 446 3232

Aladdin

Tonight - Thu, Hall Green Little Theatre, Birmingham, B27 7RY. Call 0121 707 1874

Chicago The Musical

Mon - Thu, New Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham, B5 4DS. Call 0844 338 5000

A Christmas Wassail

@ Highbury Hall 2016 Tue, The Crescent Theatre, Brindleyplace, Birmingham, B16 8AE. Call 0121 643 5858

Beyond the Barricade

Thu, Victoria Hall, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, ST1 3AD. Call 0844 871 7649

A Christmas Carol

Tonight - Thu, The Crescent Theatre, Brindleyplace, Birmingham, B5 4TD. Call 0121 643 5858

ARTS & CULTURE

Apple Tree Art LIVE

Sun, Glee Club Birmingham, The Arcadian Center, Birmingham, B5 4TD. Call 0871 472 0400

The Roaring 20s Party

Tonight - Sun, The ICC Birmingham, B1 2EA. Call 0121 200 2000

Silver Stacking Ring Class

Tomorrow, The Quarterworkshop, Birmingham, B3 1JP. See <http://jewellerysilversmithingclasses.bigcartel.com/product/silver-stacking-rings>

Tudor Christmas

Tomorrow, Blakesley Hall Museum, Birmingham, B25 8RN. Call 0121 464 2193

RCTA Christmas Floating Market

Tomorrow, Barclaycard Arena, Brindleyplace, Birmingham, B1 2AA. Call 0121 780 4141

Dr Darwin's 25th Birthday

Tomorrow, Erasmus Darwin House, Lichfield, WS13 7AD. Call 01543 306260

Woodland Elves

Tomorrow, Clent Hills, B62 0NL. Call 01562 712 822

Christmas Reindeer Reeder

Tomorrow, Creative Coffee Hub, Birmingham, B29 6HJ. Call 01215 727300

Christmas Market at The Green

Tomorrow, The Green, Meriden Park, Birmingham, B37 5TB. See <http://lineupnow.com/event/christmas-market-at-the-green>

Wire Christmas Decoration

Making Tomorrow, Creative Coffee Hub, Birmingham, B29 6HJ. Call 01215 727300

Sweet Treats

Tomorrow, Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre, Craven Arms, SY7 9RS. Call 01588 676060

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It's Grand panto time, oh yes it is!



The cast of Aladdin will be entertaining thousands of panto fans during their winter residency at the Grand Theatre

IT'S panto time at Wolverhampton Grand Theatre with Aladdin set to be the venue's biggest pantomime to date.

Running from Saturday, December 10, to Sunday, January 22, the festive family show has pop and stage star Joe McElderry as Aladdin and one of TV's Loose Women, Lisa Riley, as Slave Of The Ring.

Also in the cast is children's favourite Ben Faulks - CBeebies' Mr Bloom - who will play the Policeman. Britain's Got Talent soprano Lucy Kay is Princess Jasmine, whilst internet sensation and Black Country come-

dienne Doreen appears as the Lazy Empress Of China.

The glittering production features Ian Adams as Widow Twankey, Adam C Booth as Wishee Washee and Neal Wright as the Genie Of The Lamp.

Aladdin reunites Joe with Lucy after they received acclaim for their performances as Joseph and the Narrator in Joseph And The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat on tour.

The 2009 X Factor winner Joe will be marking his fourth year performing in pantomime. The 25-year-old singer said: "I've heard Aladdin's one of the best pantos. There's lots going on. I like the variety."

"I was obsessed with panto from about the age of four. I went every year with my family in South Shields and I desperately wanted to be part of it one day - the costumes, the dance routines, people throwing pies at each other."

"I can honestly say it's my favourite time of the year. I have a blast." He added: "This year there's a huge cast to have fun with, including Lisa Riley and Ben Faulks - and Doreen's great!"

Tickets can be booked in person at the Lichfield Street theatre, by telephone on 01902 42 92 12 or online at the grandtheatre.co.uk website.



Paris goes to Chicago

"MURDER, greed, corruption, exploitation, adultery and treachery - all those things we hold near and dear to our hearts" . . . so begins the Broadway and West End hit musical, Chicago, which is providing the alternative to panto in Birmingham this festive season.

The UK tour comes back to the Midlands for an extended stay from Monday to New Year's Eve at the New Alexandra Theatre.

This latest production of Kander and Ebb's razzle dazzle jazz age musical, set in the roaring 1920s with dangerous dames and shyler lawyers, stars EastEnders actor John Partridge as slick brief Billy Flynn. Dancing on Ice winner, Emmerdale and Coronation Street star Hayley Tamaddon plays raunchy Roxie Hart and soul singer Mica Paris is cell block matriarch 'Mama' Morton.

Mica has a top ten hit in 1988 with My One Temptation and went on to work with artists such as Alexander O'Neal, James Morrison and Jools Holland, before embarking on a musical theatre career. She is taking over in the role from Sam Bailey, who played 'Mama' Morton when Chicago was staged at Wolverhampton Grand earlier this year, and most recently from EastEnders actress Jessie Wallace.

For tickets see www.atgtickets.com/venues/new-alexandra-theatre-birmingham or call 0844 871 3011.

Blonde on Blonde revisited in Bilston

GET ready for some classic folk-rock as the festive season hits top gear.

Steve Gibbons, Dave Pegg and several other luminaries of the Midlands music scene bring The Dylan Project to the Robin 2 in Bilston on Tuesday with a special gig featuring every song from the Nobel Prize winner's Blonde on Blonde album. Then on Thursday, December 15, the same venue hosts a Christmas special from folk-rock legends Lindisfarne. Both shows are seated.

Meanwhile, Midlands melodic rock masters Magnum give their fans an early Christmas treat at the Wulfrun Hall on Saturday.

Red Hot rock to melt your baubles

NOT everything is jingle bells, there is a rock alternative.

Funky rockers Red Hot Chili Peppers turn up the heat at the NEC's Genting Arena on Saturday and Sunday nights. Korn and Limp Bizkit are a formidable double bill at the Barclaycard Arena on December 15.

Twenty years on from their acclaimed debut Fuzzy Logic, Welsh mavericks Super Furry Animals are still producing great outsider pop-rock and are at the O2 Institute in Digbeth on Saturday. The same venue hosts US hard rockers Beartooth on Sunday and the return of psychedelic Britpopers Kula Shaker on Monday.

Beatles, Stones and Beach Boys

SEVERAL top tribute bands are bringing their sound-alike shows to the region.

The Doors Alive will aim to light your fire at Birmingham's O2 Academy tomorrow (Friday), the same night that The Bootleg Beatles play Wolverhampton Civic Hall.

On Saturday Ultimate Eagles mark 40 years of Hotel California at Bilston's Robin 2, whilst the O2 Academy hosts Absolute Bowie.

Ten-piece Beach Boys tribute Surf's Up are at Bridgnorth's Theatre on the Steps on Saturday and the Shropshire venue hosts The Stones on Thursday, December 15.

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CHOICE



Dermot O'Leary

The X Factor (ITV, 8pm)

Weeks of lively auditions, gruelling boot camps and nerve-jangling live shows come to a head, in the first instalment of the annual talent show's grand final. The three remaining would-be pop-stars face yet another showdown, as judges Simon Cowell, Louis Walsh, Nicole Scherzinger and Sharon Osbourne deliver their verdict on each act's performance one final time. Taking to the stage alongside a surprise guest performer, the acts sing two songs each in front of an audience of thousands at Wembley Arena. The act with the lowest public-vote figures faces the gut-churning prospect of bowing out in third place, while the remaining two go on to battle it out in the second stage of the final.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. 10.00 Saturday Kitchen Live. **11.30** James Martin - Home Comforts at Christmas. (R) **12.00** Football Focus. **1.00** BBC News; Weather. **1.15** Regional Programme. **2.00** Christmas Supermarket Secrets. (R) **3.00** Escape to the Continent. (R) **4.00** Final Score. **5.10** Celebrity Mastermind. (R) **5.40** BBC News. **5.50** Regional Programme.

6.00 Pointless Celebrities. (R)

6.50 Strictly Come Dancing. Tensions reach their highest point yet as the four remaining pro-celebrity duos enter the semi-finals of the annual dancing competition. With three places in the grand final up for grabs, the two performers who emerge from today's contest with the highest scores will instantly progress to the next round, while the bottom two face the prospect of a nerve-racking dance-off. While there has been no shortage of drama throughout this year's contest, including Will Young's shock withdrawal early on in the competition, and Peter Kay's divisive guest appearance during the live Blackpool show, all this will pale into insignificance as the remaining stars take to the stage in an effort to claim a place in the grand final.

8.10 Michael McIntyre's Big Show. Rick Astley, Al Porter and Ollie Murs perform on stage at London's Theatre Royal, and Olympic swimmer Rebecca Adlington hands her phone to the host for Send To All.

9.10 Casualty. A riot at a department store on Christmas Eve results in a trip to the ED for miserly boss Larry. Meanwhile, Duffy's estranged husband Ryan tries to repair his fractured marriage.

10.00 The National Lottery Live. Gaby Roslin presents as the all-important winning Lotto and Thunderball numbers are revealed, with comedian Miles Jupp doing the honours and pushing the buttons.

10.10 BBC News. Weather.

10.30 Match of the Day. Gary Lineker presents: National Lottery Update.

11.50 The NFL Show. Mark Chapman looks at the major stories shaping the NFL world.

12.20 Film: Hard Rain. (1998) **1.50** Weather for the Week Ahead. **1.55** BBC News.

BBC2

6.25 Film: The Big Sky. (1952) **8.25** Film: Build My Gallows High. (1947) **10.00** Secret Britain. (R) **11.00** Homes Under the Hammer. (R) **12.00** Haiky Bikers' Best of British. (R) **1.00** Best Bakes Ever. **1.30** Film: Lust for Life. (1956) Biopic of Van Gogh, starring Kirk Douglas. **3.30** Flog It! (R) **4.10** Natural World. (R) **5.00** Film: Nativity! (2009) Comedy, starring Martin Freeman.

6.40 Operation Snow Tiger. Part one of two. The Siberian tiger is one of Earth's rarest and most elusive animals, with as few as 300 remaining. Liz Bonnin travels to the frozen forests of the far east of Russia to help a team of scientists whose goal is to uncover the hidden world of this mysterious predator, determine why their numbers are declining and see if anything can be done to improve their fortunes. (R)

7.40 Grand Tours of the Scottish Islands. The Inner Hebrides islands of Gigha and Jura which, despite their close proximity, could not be more different - one being lush and verdant, the other rugged and awe-inspiring.

8.10 Dad's Army. Lance Corporal Jones takes the plunge and decides to make an honest woman of Mrs Fox. Last-ever episode of the comedy, starring Arthur Lowe. (R)

8.45 Walt Disney - Part One. Part one of two. Documentary exploring the life and legacy of Walt Disney, beginning with his early animated work, and the success of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.

9.45 Rauschenberg - American Art Pioneer. Alastair Sooke visits the east coast of the US to profile Robert Rauschenberg, the influential American artist who bridged the gap between the abstract expressionism and pop-art.

10.45 Andy Parsons: Slacktivist. A stand-up performance by the Mock the Week panellist recorded over two nights at Harrogate Theatre in North Yorkshire during his I've Got a Shed tour in 2013. (R)

11.45 Film: In the Dark Half. (2012) Premiere. A teenager is distraught when the boy she was babysitting dies, and believes his spirit is haunting her. Horror, starring Jessica Barden.

1.05 Film: Jackpot. (2011) **2.25** This Is BBC Two.

ITV

6.00 CITV: Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids. **6.10** Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids. (R) **6.20** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.35** Signed Stories: Share a Story. (R) **6.40** Thunderbirds Are Go. (R) **7.00** Super 4. (R) **7.15** Oddbods. (R) **7.25** Scrambled!: Scrambled! **7.30** Scrambled!: Nerds & Monsters. (R) **7.50** Scrambled!: Horrid Henry. (R) **8.10** Scrambled!: The Powerpuff Girls. (R) **8.30** Scrambled!: Be Cool, Scooby-Doo! **9.05** Scrambled!: Adventure Time. (R) **9.25** Film: Carry On Don't Lose Your Head. (1966) **11.15** Judge Rinder. (R) **12.15** ITV News; Weather. **12.25** Cash Trapped. (R) **1.30** Film: Death on the Nile. (1978) Agatha Christie mystery, with Peter Ustinov. **4.10** Thunderbirds Are Go. **4.35** The Chase. (R) **5.35** Regional Programme; Weather. **5.45** ITV News; Weather.

6.00 Tipping Point: Lucky Stars. Ben Shephard invites celebrities to take part in a special edition of the quiz show, in which contestants Rufus Hound, Nadia Sawalha and JB Gill answer questions to win turns on an arcade-style machine. Dropping tokens down a choice of four chutes, they hope to knock piles of them off a moving shelf - and the more they collect, the better their chances of collecting the £20,000 prize for their selected charity. (R)

7.00 Go for It. Stephen Mulhern presents a special edition of the talent-based game show, this time giving members of the public a chance to take on previous contributors in a battle of one-upmanship. Should the competitors successfully pull off their implausible stunts, they stand a chance of winning a £1,000 prize, and a guest star has been lined up to make an appearance.

8.00 The X Factor. Dermot O'Leary presents the first of two grand final shows, in which the three remaining acts battle it out to determine to avoid ending the contest in third place.

10.05 The Jonathan Ross Show. Paul Hollywood, Miranda Hart, Keira Knightley, Kylie Minogue and David Walliams join Jonathan for festive fun. Last in the series.

11.10 ITV News. Weather.

11.25 Film: Senna. (2010) Documentary exploring the life of Formula One world champion Ayrton Senna. **1.20** Jackpot247. **3.00** ITV Nightscreen.

CHANNEL 4

6.10 Gillette World Sport. **6.40** ITERA Expedition Race Ireland. **7.05** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **7.30** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **7.55** Frasier. (R) **8.25** Frasier. (R) **9.00** The Morning Line. **10.00** The Big Bang Theory. **10.30** The Big Bang Theory. **11.00** The Big Bang Theory. **11.30** The Simpsons. (R) **12.00** The Simpsons. (R) **12.30** Deal or No Deal. **1.30** Channel 4 Racing. Live coverage from Cheltenham and Doncaster. **4.00** Jamie's Super Food. (R) **4.30** Location, Location, Location. (R) **5.35** A Place in the Sun: Winter Sun.

6.30 Channel 4 News.

7.00 Jutland: WWI's Greatest Sea Battle. Re-examining the events of the First World War sea battle, during which thousands of British sailors lost their lives in less than 24 hours. (R)

8.00 Pearl Harbour: The New Evidence. Documentary shedding light on whether there is any truth to conspiracy theorists' suggestions that London and Washington had been aware the Japanese were planning to assault the American naval base at Pearl Harbour in 1941, but refused to act on the intelligence as part of a plot to bring the full might of America's military into the Second World War. In the wake of the attack, an investigation into how US forces failed to anticipate the assault concluded that Admiral Husband Kimmel, Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet, had been guilty of dereliction of duty, a charge that left his career in tatters. Making use of new research into a top-secret US military project, as well as thousands of freshly unearthed documents, letters and photographs, this film aims to answer - once and for all - whether the brutal attack that claimed nearly 2,500 lives could have been prevented.

9.00 It Was Alright in the 1970s. Matt Lucas returns to poke more fun at Britain's viewing habits in the 1970s, this time turning attention to politically incorrectness in some of the nation's favourite TV comedies.

10.00 Film: Paul. (2011) Sci-fi comedy, with Simon Pegg and Nick Frost. **12.05** Film: Kingpin. (1996) **2.10** Holyoaks. (R) **4.15** Location, Location, Location. (R) **5.10** Kirstie's Handmade Treasures. (R) **5.25** Deal or No Deal. (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake! **9.45** The Fairly OddParents. (R) **10.20** Film: Hats Off to Christmas! (2013) **12.05** Film: Deck the Halls. (2006) Christmas comedy, starring Danny DeVito and Matthew Broderick. **1.55** Film: The Nine Lives of Christmas. (2014) Romantic comedy, starring Brandon Routh and Kimberly Sustad. **3.30** Film: Mrs Miracle 2: Miracle in Manhattan. (2010) Family drama sequel, starring Doris Roberts. **5.25** Film: Finding Father Christmas. (2016) Premiere. Drama, starring Erin Krakow.

7.10 NCIS: Silent Night, Deadly Night. A murder investigation leads the team to provide protection for a pregnant marine whose unborn child could sway the balance of power in Afghanistan. (R)

8.00 NCIS: Mistletoe & Murder. Returning from a six-month posting in the Gulf, Navy lieutenant commander Megan Huffman opens her front door to find her husband Noel dead in his chair. Gibbs and the team investigate and find the victim died three or four weeks earlier, and an unusual \$100 bill in his wallet proves to be a vital clue. Meanwhile, Tony's sister visits for Christmas and looks to rebuild their fractured relationship. Guest starring Robert Wagner. (R)

8.55 5 News Weekend.

9.00 Football on 5: The Championship. George Riley and Lynsey Hipgrave introduce highlights from the weekend's games in the Championship, including Newcastle United v Birmingham City at St James' Park, Aston Villa v Wigan Athletic at Villa Park and Barnsley v Norwich City at Oakwell.

10.00 Football on 5: Goal Rush. George Riley and Lynsey Hipgrave introduce all the goals from the weekend's games in the Leagues One and Two, including Bradford City v Charlton Athletic.

10.30 That's So 1989. A look at the events of 1989, which saw the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Tiananmen Square crackdown and chart hits by Black Box, Cher and Madonna. (R)

11.30 Impractical Jokers UK. The boys pursue bizarre lines of enquiry while manning a sweet shop, and act according to the will of their friends during a shoe shop-based challenge.

12.00 SportCasino. **3.10** Film: Wrong Turn. (2003) **4.35** Access. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Four

7.00 The Other Pompeii: Life and Death in Herculaneum **8.00** Pavlopetri - The City Beneath the Waves **9.00** Modus **10.30** Top of the Pops: 1982 **11.45** Britain's Most Dangerous Songs: Listen to the Planned **12.45** More Dangerous Songs: And the Banned Played On **1.45** Heavy Metal Britain **3.15** Metal at the BBC **3.45** Close

ITV2

11.45 I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here! Coming Out **12.50** The Hot Desk: Jonas Blue **1.00** Catchphrase Mother's Day Special **2.00** Hairdresser Level **4.40** Film: Peter Pan (2003) **5.40** FYI Daily **5.45** Film: Peter Pan (2003) **6.50** Film: The Incredible Hulk (2008) **7.50** FYI Daily **7.55** Film: The Incredible Hulk (2008) **9.00** Scorpion **10.05** The Xtra Factor Live **11.05** Celebrity Juice Christmas Special **12.05** Family Guy **1.05** American Dad! **1.55** Bordertown **2.45** Teleshopping **5.45** ITV2 Nightscreen

ITV3

11.35 A Touch of Frost **1.35** Inspector Morse **3.50** Midsomer Murders **8.00** Doc Martin **9.00** The Booze Cruise **2.2** The Treasure Hunt **11.00** A Is for Acid **1.10** Wycliffe **2.10** ITV3 Nightscreen **2.30** Teleshopping

ITV4

11.10 Storage Wars: Best of Darrell and Brandon **11.40** Pawn Stars **1.40** Film: Tobruk (1967) **2.45** FYI Daily **2.50** Film: Tobruk (1967) **3.50** Film: Superman (1978) **5.10** FYI Daily **5.15** Film: Superman (1978) **6.50** The Chase: Celebrity Special **7.55** River Monsters **9.00** Film: Firefox (1982) **11.45** Film: Assassins (1995) **12.50** FYI Daily **12.55** Film: Assassins (1995) **2.30** Tommy Cooper **3.00** Teleshopping

E4

11.35 The Goldbergs **12.30** Black-ish **1.30** Film: Gulliver's Travels (2010) **3.15** Rude (ish) Tube Shorts **3.30** The Big Bang Theory **7.30** Film: The Twilight Saga: Eclipse (2010) **10.00** Googlebox **12.05** The Big Bang Theory **2.00** The Inbetweeners **2.55** Rude Tube **3.50** Young & Hungry **4.10** Animals Unleashed **5.00** Revenge

Film4

11.00 Miracle on 34th Street (1947) **1.00** City of Ember (2008) **2.50** Love Happens (2009) **4.55** We Bought a Zoo (2011) **7.20** Men in Black II (2002) **9.00** Fast & Furious 5 (2011) Action adventure sequel, starring Vin Diesel and Dwayne Johnson. **11.35** The Anomaly (2014) **1.30** Mindscape (2013) **3.35** Close

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CHOICE



Hattie Morahan

My Mother and Other Strangers (BBC1, 9pm)
Rose is preoccupied by Dreyfuss' absence and rejects him when he returns after three weeks. The children are delighted when it is revealed that a Christmas party is going to be held at the aerodrome, but the celebration stirs up tension within the community, especially when Ned Hanlon discovers his family are not invited. Michael receives bad news from his cousin and needs the support of his family more than ever, while Rose is left torn when she learns the reason for Dreyfuss' disappearance during the Christmas party.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **7.35** Match of the Day. (R) **9.00** The Andrew Marr Show. **10.00** Fern Britton Meets Michael Gove. **11.00** Regional Programme. **12.15** Bargain Hunt. (R) **1.00** BBC News; Weather. **1.15** Homes Under the Hammer. (R) **2.00** Escape to the Country. (R) **2.45** Lifeline. **2.55** Film: Kung Fu Panda. (2008) Animated comedy, with the voice of Jack Black. **4.20** Planet Earth II. (R) **5.20** Songs of Praise. **5.55** BBC News. **6.10** Regional Programme. **6.20** Countryfile. The team explores the various landscapes of Aberdeenshire, where Helen Skelton visits an open-air aquarium and a village with no cars while Joe Crowley finds out about the area's diminishing wildcat population. Sean Fletcher visits a turkey farm using alpacas as guard dogs, Adam Henson catches up with the winner of One Man and His Dog, and Tom Heap reports on council farms. Including weather for the week ahead. **7.20** Strictly Come Dancing: The Results. Tess Daly and Claudia Winkelman reveal which of the four remaining couples is through to the final. **8.00** Planet Earth II. Footage of wild animals that have made a home in cities, including leopards on the streets of Mumbai, peregrine falcons hunting among New York's skyscrapers, hyenas that live peacefully alongside the people of Harar and langurs in Jodhpur, which are regarded as having great religious significance by the citizens. The programme also examines how some animals are struggling to survive in urban environments, and questions how cities can be built to serve their needs as well as those of the human inhabitants. Last in the series. **9.00** My Mother and Other Strangers. Rose rejects Dreyfuss when he returns to the village, but feels torn when she learns the reason for his disappearance during a Christmas party at the aerodrome. Last in the series. **10.00** BBC News. **10.20** Regional Programme. **10.30** Match of the Day 2. **11.45** Sunny D. **12.10** Citizen Khan. (R) **12.40** Weather for the Week Ahead. **12.45** BBC News.

BBC2

7.15 Big Dreams Small Spaces. (R) **8.15** Carol Klein's Plant Odysseys. (R) **8.45** Countryfile. (R) **9.45** Saturday Kitchen Best Bites. **11.15** Tom Kerridge's Proper Pub Food. (R) **11.45** Best Bakes Ever. (R) **12.15** MOTD2 Extra. **1.00** Film: Quantrell's Raiders. (1958) Civil War Western, starring Steve Cochran. **2.10** Film: Dial M for Murder. (1954) Alfred Hitchcock's thriller, starring Ray Milland. **3.50** Athletics: European Cross Country Championships. **4.50** Heir Hunters. (R) **5.35** Flog It! (R) **6.35** The Toys That Made Christmas. Robert Webb takes a light-hearted look back at playthings of the past, offering fortysomethings the chance to reminisce about the days before PlayStation, laptops and iPods. It was a more innocent time when Fuzzy-Felt and Spirograph brought out the artist in everyone, girls spent hours with Barbie and boys were engrossed in trying to bolt together their impossibly fiddly Meccano models – to name just four of the toys mentioned. (R) **8.00** Film: The Lone Ranger. (2013) Premiere. A lawyer is left for dead after an ambush in which his Texas ranger brother is killed, but is saved by a mysterious Native American fugitive. Concealing his identity behind a mask, he and his new ally hunt down the outlaws behind the attack – only to find their actions are just part of a larger evil scheme. Western, starring Armie Hammer and Johnny Depp. Edited for pre-watershed broadcast. **10.20** QI XL. Richard Osman, Lolly Adolphe and Lee Mack join regular panelist Alan Davies and host Sandi Toksvig to contemplate the theme "naked truth" in this extended episode. **11.05** Black Is the New Black. The experiences of people who are black and British, with contributions from figures drawn from the worlds of politics, business, religion and science. (R) **11.35** Black Is the New Black. Naomi Campbell, Dizzee Rascal, David Harewood, Tinie Tempah, Trevor McDonald and Alesha Dixon share their thoughts on growing up, touching on family, school and the working world. (R) **12.05** Film: Ash Wednesday. (2002) **1.40** Sign Zone: Countryfile. (R) **2.35** Holby City. (R) **3.35** This is BBC Two.

ITV

6.00 CITV: Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids. **6.10** Grizzly Tales for Gruesome Kids. (R) **6.20** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.35** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.45** Sooty. (R) **6.55** Signed Stories. (R) **7.00** Super 4. (R) **7.15** Oddbods. (R) **7.25** Scrambled!: Scrambled! **7.30** Scrambled!: Nerds & Monsters. (R) **7.50** Scrambled!: Horrid Henry. (R) **8.10** Scrambled!: The Powerpuff Girls. (R) **8.30** Scrambled!: Thunderbirds Are Go. **9.05** Scrambled!: Adventure Time. (R) **9.25** ITV News. **9.30** Wild Australia with Ray Mears. (R) **10.00** Let's Do Christmas with Gino & Mel. (R) **11.00** Film: Dragonheart. (1996) **12.55** ITV News; Weather. **1.00** Midsomer Murders. (R) **2.55** The X Factor. (R) **5.00** The Chase. (R) **6.00** Regional Programme; Weather. **6.15** ITV News; Weather. **6.30** Off Their Rockers. Tulisa Contostavlos loses her chauffeur, Marry and Joan compete to see who is the most like a Kardashians, and Dave gets his back waxed. Last in the series. **7.00** The Next Great Magician. Stephen Mulhern and Rochelle Humes present the series finale, in which the winners from the past five weeks' shows return with their most spectacular illusions. Last in the series. **8.00** The X Factor. Dermot O'Leary introduces the climax of this year's talent contest. The results of last night's performance at Wembley Arena are in and one of the three finalists has been eliminated from the contest. The two remaining acts must give one final performance to impress the viewing public and the judges, before one of them is crowned as this year's winner. Last in the series. **10.05** ITV News; Weather. **10.25** Ball and Boe: One Night Only. Double Olivier Award-winning star of the stage Michael Ball and top tenor Alfie Boe join forces for an evening of music, including theatrical classics from their new album Together. (R) **11.25** The Jeremy Kyle Show USA. The host takes his successful talk show stateside, where he invites American guests to air their differences, and dispenses his own judgment on the situation. (R) **12.10** Jackpot247. **3.00** Motorsport UK. **3.50** ITV Nightscreen.

CHANNEL 4

6.15 The King of Queens. (R) **6.40** The King of Queens. (R) **7.05** The King of Queens. (R) **7.30** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **7.55** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **8.25** Frasier. (R) **9.00** Frasier. (R) **9.30** Sunday Brunch. **12.25** Deal or No Deal. **1.20** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **1.45** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **2.10** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **2.35** The Simpsons. (R) **3.00** The Simpsons. (R) **3.30** The Simpsons. (R) **4.00** Film: Jingle All the Way. (1996) Comedy, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. **5.45** Channel 4 News. **6.15** Film: Paddington. (2014) Premiere. An earthquake forces a bear from the Peruvian jungle to start a new life in London. He finds modern Britain to be very different from the stories told to him by his aunt, but makes a new home with a kindly family. However, a sinister taxidermist intends to turn him into a museum exhibit. Comedy based on Michael Bond's series of children's books, starring Hugh Bonneville, Sally Hawkins and Nicole Kidman, with the voice of Ben Whishaw. **8.00** Christmas at the Chateau. Dick Strawbridge and Angel Adoree await the arrival of their guests, who are expecting a luxurious Christmas at the chateau. Dick continues work on installing the lift, but the project tests his ingenuity to the limit, while Angel finds more valuables in the attic, including a collection of vinyl records. Last in the series. **9.00** Humans. Laura discovers that Mia and Hester are preparing to break into the silo, and goes in search of Niska to ask for her help – but the synth's attack on the facility does not go to plan. Karen goes in search of Athena and makes a life-changing decision. Mattie asks Max to help save Leo from Hester's influence, while Toby receives a disturbing message. **10.00** Gogglebox. Capturing the households' instant reactions to what they are watching on TV from the comfort of their own sofas. (R) **11.00** Film: Filth. (2013) A corrupt policeman plots to turn his colleagues against each other as his own cocaine use spirals out of control. Black comedy, starring James McAvoy and Imogen Poots. **12.50** Film: The Iceman. (2012) **2.35** The Last Leg. (R) **3.30** Kirstie and Phil's Love It or List It. (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake!: Milkshake! Monkey. **6.05** Milkshake! Bop Box. (R) **6.10** Peppa Pig. (R) **6.15** Angelina Ballerina. (R) **6.25** Bob the Builder. (R) **6.40** Wanda and the Alien. (R) **6.50** Zack and Quack. (R) **7.00** Seaside Antics. (R) **7.05** Fireman Sam. (R) **7.15** Pip Ahoy! (R) **7.30** Little Princess. (R) **7.45** Paw Patrol. (R) **8.00** Blaze and the Monster Machines. **8.25** Noddy in Toyland. (R) **8.40** Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom. (R) **9.10** Shimmer and Shine. (R) **9.25** Peppa Pig. (R) **9.35** Peppa Pig. (R) **9.45** Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom. (R) **9.55** The Fairly OddParents. (R) **10.30** Football on 5: The Championship. (R) **11.30** Football on 5: Goal Rush. (R) **12.00** The Gadget Show. (R) **12.55** Cats Make You Laugh Out Loud. (R) **1.55** Film: Grumpy Cat's Worst Christmas Ever. (2014) Premiere. Comedy, starring Megan Charpentier. **3.35** Film: A Prince for Christmas. (2015) Premiere. Festive romance, starring Viva Bianca. **5.20** Film: A Cinderella Christmas. (2016) Premiere. Romantic comedy, starring Emma Rigby and Peter Porte. **7.10** Film: Jackie Chan's The Forbidden Kingdom. (2008) An American teenager obsessed with kung fu movies is sent back in time to ancient China, where he joins the battle to free the imprisoned Monkey King. The only problem is he has no martial arts skills of his own, and will need the assistance of two legendary warriors to become the hero he needs to be. Martial arts adventure, starring Jet Li and Jackie Chan. Edited for violence and language. **9.00** Film: The Expendables 3. (2014) Premiere. Soldier of fortune Barney Ross discovers an old friend he was forced to kill is still alive, and has become a powerful arms dealer with vengeance on his mind. Barney is forced to recruit a new band of mercenaries and adopt more modern tactics to deal with this threat to him and his past associates. Action thriller sequel, starring Sylvester Stallone and Mel Gibson. Includes 5 News Update at 10pm. **11.25** Film: The Last Stand. (2013) The sheriff of a small town on the Mexican border tries to stop a drug lord from fleeing the country. Action thriller, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. **1.15** SuperCasino. **3.10** Secret Life of Puppies: Terrible Twos. (R) **4.00** Now That's Funny! (R) **4.50** House Doctor. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Four
7.00 Horizon: The Secret Life of the Dog
8.00 Choir of the Year 2016 **9.30** The Flying Archaeologist **10.00** The Sky at Night **10.30** Horizon: Seeing Stars **11.30** How to Build a Nuclear Submarine **12.30** Masters of Moscow: George Blake – Storyville **2.00** Monkey Planet **3.00** The Other Pompeii: Life and Death in Herculaneum **4.00** Close **ITV2**
3.30 Film: The Polar Express (2004) **4.30** FYI Daily **4.35** Film: The Smurfs: A Christmas Carol **5.55** Catchphrase Christmas Special **6.55** You've Been Framed! Gold At Christmas **8.00** Film: The Mask (1994) **9.00** FYI Daily **9.05** Film: The Mask (1994) **10.05** The Xtra Factor **11.05** Family Guy **12.35** American Dad! **1.30** The Cleveland Show **2.25** Teleshopping **5.55** ITV2 Nightscreen **ITV3**
11.05 Inspector Morse **1.20** Film: Columbo: By Dawn's Early Light (1974) **3.30** Film: Les Misérables (1978) **4.35** FYI Daily **4.40** Film: Les Misérables (1978) **5.55** Agatha Christie's Marple **8.00** Rosemary & Thyme **10.00** Alexander Armstrong's Land of the Midnight Sun **11.05** Film: Elizabeth: The Golden Age (2007) **12.05** FYI Daily **12.10** Film: Elizabeth: The Golden Age (2007) **1.25** Inspector Morse **3.15** May the Best House Win **4.55** You're Only Young Twice **5.45** ITV3 Nightscreen **ITV4**
3.30 Film: Superman (1978) **4.45** FYI Daily **4.50** Film: Superman (1978) **6.25** Film: The Great Outdoors (1988) **7.25** FYI Daily **7.30** Film: The Great Outdoors (1988) **8.10** Film: Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure (1989) **9.10** FYI Daily **9.15** Film: Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure (1989) **10.00** Film: Death Wish V: The Face of Death (1994) **11.00** FYI Daily **11.05** Film: Death Wish V: The Face of Death (1994) **12.05** Film: Universal Soldier: Day of Reckoning (2012) **1.05** FYI Daily **1.10** Film: Universal Soldier: Day of Reckoning (2012) **2.15** Tommy Cooper **2.50** ITV4 Nightscreen **E4**
1.00 Film: Diary of a Wimpy Kid (2010) **3.00** The Big Bang Theory: Time Warped **9.00** Film: Ted (2012) **11.00** Tattoo Fixers **12.05** Naked Attraction **1.10** Gogglebox **2.15** New Girl **3.45** Hollyoaks **Film4**
1.00 Short Circuit 2 (1988) **3.15** Carry On Teacher (1959) **5.00** Field of Dreams (1989) **7.05** Unstoppable (2010) **9.00** Men in Black 3 (2012)

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FILM CHOICES

MONDAY

An Unexpected Christmas, Channel 5, 3.15pm

Newlyweds the Fabers plan to host their first Christmas together and want everything to be perfect for their visiting relatives. However, Cynthia learns she is pregnant ahead of schedule and Steve suddenly loses his job, so the couple decide to hide the news from their families. Festive comedy, starring Susie Abromet, Dillon Casey and Erin Gray. (2016)

TUESDAY

Mrs Miracle 2: Miracle in Manhattan, Channel 5, 1.30pm

The kindly Mrs Merkle takes a job in the toy section of a financially struggling department store. She helps the downtrodden manager to enjoy a happy Christmas for once by making a success of the business and assisting him in his quest to find love. Family drama sequel, starring Doris Roberts, Eric Johnson, Jewel Stalte and Lauren Holly. (2010)



22 Jump Street, Friday, Channel 5, 9pm

WEDNESDAY

A Nanny for Christmas, Channel 5, 3.20pm

An unemployed advertising executive gets a job as an au pair and tries to give the kids in her charge a break from their rigidly organised lives. She tries to impress an executive she is attracted to by claiming to still be in the advertising business, a deception that proves hard to maintain. Romantic comedy, starring Emmanuelle Vaugier and Richard Ruccolo. (2010)

THURSDAY

A Husband for Christmas, Channel 5, 1.25pm

Sparks fly between a graphic designer and her male counterpart when they agree to a loveless marriage of convenience to help each other out. Romantic comedy, starring Ricky Ross. (2016)

FRIDAY

22 Jump Street, Channel 5, 9pm

Undercover cops Schmidt and Jenko are sent on a new assignment at a university. When one joins the college American football team and the other falls in with a crowd of Bohemian artists, loyalty to their new cliques puts a strain on their friendship. Crime comedy, starring Jonah Hill and Channing Tatum. (2014)

Claudia looks to make all the right moves

If you feel like the pop music of 2016 has largely passed you by, you're in good company.

Claudia Winkleman admits she's not exactly got her finger on the pulse either. She says: "Music stopped for me when Duran Duran stopped. So you know how you have a cool person? I'm the opposite of that."

"The music I like is the music that I listen to on the radio all the time and I'm like 'oh I know that one!'"

Although we suspect the Strictly Come Dancing presenter is being more than a little self-deprecating, it's probably for the best that she's not hosting the BBC Music Awards 2016 on her own. Instead, she's joining forces with Fearne Cotton, who she thinks is the perfect person for the job.

Claudia says: "I can't wait to be with Fearne as all we've ever done is chatted and gossiped. She's a proper friend, and we've never worked together so I'm just going to be standing there smiling at her."

"She's amazing and she's got

musical gravitas. She knows what she's talking about and I can be the idiot, and that always suits me."

And of course, the awards will give Claudia and the viewers a chance to remind themselves (or learn for the first time) what's been going on in the world of music over the past 12 months.

The ceremony, which comes to us live from the ExCel in London, will feature five awards; BBC Music British Artist of the Year, Song of the Year, BBC Music Introducing Artist of the Year, BBC Radio 1 Live Lounge Performance of the Year and BBC Radio 2 Album of the Year.

And there will also be live performances from some of the biggest names in music, including Kaiser Chiefs, Lukas Graham, Emeli Sandé, the 1975, Robbie Williams and Craig David.

Fearne is especially excited about seeing Craig: "He's a really old friend of mine and I absolutely adore him and I love the fact that he's had this amazing comeback

after all these years of holding his nerve and doing what he does, just privately still making great music. I think the arena is going to go absolutely wild for him."

"So I'm really excited about that and also The 1975 are a great little band doing so well internationally now and it's always lovely to see Robbie play as well. Literally everyone there will be fantastic."

Claudia adds: "I can't wait to see Robbie Williams. He's such a brilliant showman and I don't think he's ever given a lacklustre performance."

It might even be enough to convince Claudia that there is musical life after Duran Duran, but just don't expect her to become such a fully fledged muso that she embraces the current vinyl revival.

When asked if she'll go back to buying LPs, her answer is: "Don't be ridiculous. I'm technically challenged because I am an old lady but I have worked out iTunes."



BBC Music Awards 2016, Monday, BBC1, 8.30pm

BEST OF THE REST

MONDAY

David Blaine: Beyond Magic Channel 4, 9pm

The illusionist is back in action – and about time. He seems to have given up burying himself alive, living in a Perspex box or standing on something very high – at least for now – in favour of getting back to basics, proving once and for all that less really can be more. Blaine first became famous for his street magic performances, during which he stunned members of the public with a series of bizarre tricks that defied explanation and expectations. This new, one-hour special sees him do the same again, and his targets are some of the world's most famous faces, including David Beckham, Johnny Depp, David Chappelle, John Travolta, Emma Stone, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Patrick Stewart, who is no stranger to mind-bending stunts thanks to his performance as Charles Xavier in the X-Men movies.

TUESDAY

The Royal Variety Performance ITV, 7.30pm

David Walliams hosts the annual event, this time from London's Hammersmith Apollo in the presence of The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall. The line-up includes Barry Gibb, Sting,

Robbie Williams, Gary Barlow, Sheridan Smith, Emeli Sande, DNCE, OneRepublic, ABC and Britain's Got Talent winner Lance Corporal Richard Jones. There are performances by the cast of the Beatles Cirque du Soleil's LOVE show, and previews of Gershwin's musical An American in Paris, and The Girls, which both open in the West End next year. Amber Riley, star of Dreamgirls, and McFly's Tom Fletcher also take part, along with Diversity, Joe Lycett, Alan Davies and Rob Beckett.

WEDNESDAY

The Trafford Centre: Countdown to Christmas Channel 5, 9pm

It's a common complaint that Christmas seems to start earlier each year, but at the Manchester's Trafford Centre, there's a good reason why the plans for the festive season begin in the spring. With six million Christmas shoppers expected to visit the retail complex, the staff really can't afford to put off the preparations until after Bonfire Night. This two-part documentary follows events manager Nikki Tansey as she spearheads the centre's

Christmas operations for the first time, a job that involves heading to Huddersfield to pick up 50 miles of fairy lights and enough baubles to fill a swimming pool. But can she also find a star to switch all those lights on? Meanwhile, Nikki's bosses hope a new TV advertising campaign will ensure shoppers don't abandon the centre in favour of online retailers.

THURSDAY

Xmas Excess: Parents Splash the Cash Channel 5, 8pm

Christmas is a time for giving, but it seems that some people get rather carried away with that idea – and some of them are featured in this documentary. It introduces viewers to the mums and dads who can't help spoiling their offspring at this time of year. Among them is devoted mother-of-three Emma

Tapping, whose photograph of her tree hidden by a mountain of presents hit the headlines. Also discussing the subject is Irene Malin who, with her oil tycoon husband, takes the camera crew on one of her epic shopping sprees, during which they splash the cash on jewellery worth thousands of pounds. Well, if you've got it, flaunt it, right? Or is it a case that you can have too much of a good thing after all?

FRIDAY

The Gadget Show Channel 5, 7pm

If you have a techie in your life who would love the latest gadget for Christmas but you're on a tight budget, then never fear – the team are ending the current series with some money-saving advice. Harry Wallop gives Oris a few tips on how the early adopters can get the newest technology for less, and Jason reveals how you can cash in on the craze for all the things retro by selling off some of your gizmos that are no longer at the cutting edge. Jon tests out three TVs to see which offers the best value for money, Amy takes a closer look at some of the latest entertainment packages from the likes of Netflix, Amazon and Now TV, and we also find out whether second-hand premium devices are a better buy than their brand new mid-range equivalents.



The Royal Variety Performance, Tuesday, ITV, 7.30pm

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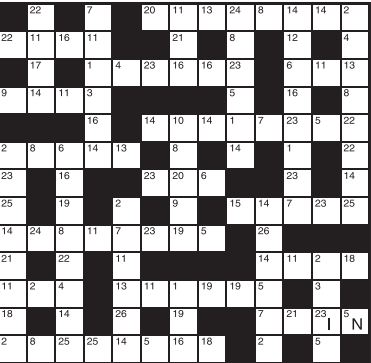
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BRAIN GYM No.407

Codeword

Each number in the grid represents a different letter of the alphabet and every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letter(s) to the right of the main grid to start you off.



LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION:

1	Y	Y	X	N	I	D	A	L	R	W	Q	T	M
2	H	U	K	B	F	C	O	E	P	J	G	Z	S

Double Crossword

Choose either quick or cryptic clues - both fit the same grid.

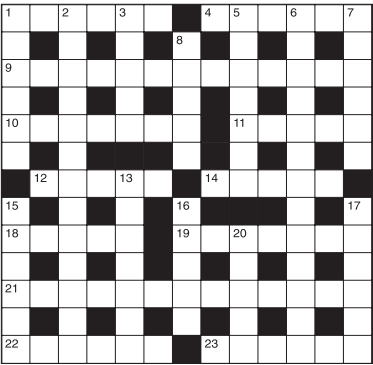
Cryptic Clues:

Across

- The seat holds 50 who quail (6)
- Knock the girl in this direction (6)
- Don't be secretive at home: entertain everybody! (4,4,5)
- No artificial note (7)
- Busy worker begins small church in wood (5)
- One offers next to no time in it (5)
- Look hard at such rates (5)
- Love affair of the first persons in the morning (5)
- Evict the actors for a parish (7)
- Tearing mine to bits in military discipline (13)
- He pays rent for article in temporary home (6)
- Presumably actors go through them as well as on them (6)

Down

- Monarch has degree in cooking (6)
- Originator of shocking notes? (8,5)
- Noted performers, together (5)
- Live according to custom (7)
- Demolition of a residence is a crime (5-8)
- Repeat the sound about when I leave. Cheerio! (2-4)
- They make rings round them (5)
- Stoker who tries to undo his own work? (7)
- Vegetable causes vehicle to decay (6)
- Committed to spring (5)
- Paradoxically they may have seats in them (6)
- Pamphlet about an area of land? (5)



Quick Clues:

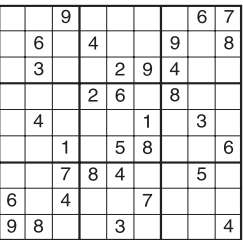
Across

- Sieve (6)
- Teem (6)
- Unemotional (13)
- Bring on (5)
- Medieval coin (5)
- Disgrace (5)
- Upright (5)
- Beaming (7)
- Forethought (13)
- Oppose (6)
- Prime (6)

Down

- Lessen (6)
- Depravity (13)
- Smallest (5)
- Studious (7)
- Solo (13)
- Gloomy (6)
- Apart (5)
- Ingenuous (7)
- Assistant (6)
- Weak (5)
- Niggardly (6)
- Cover (5)

Sudoku



Fill in the grid below so that every column, every row and each of the 3x3 boxes contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS >

2	7	6	1	3	4	8	5	9
4	8	9	5	6	2	1	3	7
5	3	1	9	8	7	2	4	6
9	4	7	8	2	3	6	2	1
8	6	3	7	2	1	4	9	5
1	2	5	4	9	6	7	8	3
7	9	8	6	4	5	3	1	2
3	1	4	2	7	9	5	6	8
6	5	2	3	1	8	9	7	4

LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS: CRYPTIC - Across: 1 Right-hand men; 7 Donor; 8 Catch; 9 Run; 10 Fieldlark; 11 Theory; 12 Andrew; 15 Card table; 17 Lie; 18 Erice; 19 Ebony; 21 Undertakings. Down: 1 Return ticket; 2 Tun; 3 Airmen; 4 Decadence; 5 Extra; 6 Wheelwrights; 7 Dense; 10 First-rate; 13 Rally; 14 Object; 16 Feign; 20 Oak. QUICK - Across: 1 Inarticulate; 7 There; 8 Grain; 9 Rip; 10 Impotence; 11 Excite; 12 Morass; 15 Infuriate; 17 Gun; 18 Twine; 19 Under; 21 Intelligence. Down: 1 Intermediate; 2 Toe; 3 Greasy; 4 Lighsome; 5 Train; 6 Unseasonable; 7 Topic; 10 Intercede; 13 Anger; 14 Manual; 16 Feign; 20 Dig.

Quiz

- How were the six daughters of Lord Redesdale better known?
- Which marine mammal's two N hemisphere varieties are the Steller's and the Californian?
- Which country's mafia is called the Yakuza?
- Who wrote the play Chips with Everything in 1962?
- From which words does the Modem

- derive its name?
- Who played the female lead in the film Pulp Fiction?
- Which philosopher was Socrates's pupil and Aristotle's teacher?
- What is the only place in England still to use the title alderman?
- What do the letters RIP stand for?
- Who is the patron saint of Spain?

Last week's solutions:

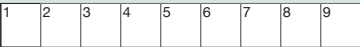
- Quiz: 1 The Queen Mother; 2 Corsica; 3 Harry Saltzman; 4 Deserts; 5 Clematis; 6 Sir Edward Elgar; 7 Anton Chekhov; 8 Jamiroquai; 9 Electronic musical instrument; 10 Yangon.

Niner: BLUEPRINT

Niner

Each number from 1 to 9 represents a different letter. Solve the clues and insert the letters in the appropriate squares to discover a word which uses all nine letters.

- 519243 gives a church leader,
537892 gives a second church leader,
513796 gives a church district.



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Teamwork Juhel in crown at Masala

With tasty dishes and such helpful staff MARK SHIPP found the Masala Lounge was absolutely mint

FORGET Peter Kay and his garlic bread, I've found an alternative taste sensation, mint rice. Mint . . . and rice. It's the future I tell you.

It was not my initial choice to accompany my fish dish at the Masala Lounge in Wednesfield, I had opted for a sizzling variety. However, I listened to the advice of the waiter, and didn't regret it.

Located at the old Cross Guns pub, in Lichfield Road, the restaurant itself is doing a roaring trade and has been a popular draw for the townsfolk since it opened four years ago.

Inviting

It's easy to see why as it's spacious and inviting, with more than 100 covers, and with booths for the extra privacy and comfort, more than adequately catering for the customers wishing to get a taste of what is on offer.

Parking is available, too, which is always an added attraction. Nine staff are employed at Masala Lounge, and it's clear they have a rapport with the clientele.

Jointly operated by Juhel Miah and Hafiz Khan, one could even say it's the 'Juhel' in the crown.

The management team have run restaurants around the West Midlands, while the chef has 35 years experience. Having honed his skills in India, he has worked in many top UK restaurants, so there's no doubting the quality of fare on offer. It has five stars from RateMy Plate



The Masala Lounge, in Lichfield Road, Wednesfield, which opened four years ago

and has been highly recommended on Trip Advisor due to its favourable reviews on the site.

The menu comes with fusion appetisers and authentic curries, together with tandoori exclusives and traditional favourites. Fish dishes include the zinga cinnamon and the cod machli salan, which was my choice. But this was after starters, something I rarely partake in.

They just sounded so tempting, however, like the haddock kebab, dipped in eggs, with mixed spices and breadcrumbs. I overlooked

that, though, in favour of the Bombay wraps, chicken breast served in a sweet chilli sauce, while the other half chose the vegetable samosa.

She even strayed from tradition by going half and half with her regular chicken makhani, combining it with a chicken dahi, which she enjoyed just as much. Oh yes, and there was a tikka masala for our younger guest.

My own main was meaty, only moderately spicy, but the accompanying rice was something I would never have dreamed of.



The plush interior of popular restaurant, run by Juhel Miah and Hafiz Khan

It worked a treat. The restaurant is not licensed, but I was able to wash mine down with some ale that I bought earlier. The starters took their toll as we were unable to manage desserts, despite its tempting selections.

Masala Lounge is open every day from 5.30pm. Bookings are being taken for Christmas Day, with three choices of either Indian or English fare for £28.95 per adult and £12.95 for children, under 12.

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MARY, passionate honest slim blue-eyed blonde, 39yrs, likes nights in/out, looking for affectionate male, any age to spend adult fun times. Interested? call me. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 425009

NAUGHTY curvy 46yr old lady, outgoing and bubbly with a naughty side and lots of banter, WLTm chap 30+. If you are married even better. ACA. Tel: 0906 515 3015 Box 424543

JEAN, mature lady, genuine with many hobbies, slim, blonde and attractive. WLTm interesting gent with GSOH, must be cheerful, looks unimportant. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424675

SARAH, 39yrs, married, seeking chap for no strings intimate times. Special friendship, mutual respect. Give me a call. Tel: 0906 515 3031 Box 408291

SANDRA, smart, sophisticated lady young looking 60s, genuine and kind seeks gent with GSOH, looks unimportant. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424671

TAMIKA, mature black beauty, hourglass figure and open minded. Pls call if you are discreet, broad minded and nice. I can travel and accommodate. ACA. Tel: 0906 515 3007 Box 423655

SUE, 60s lady, calling all gents who seek a mature solvent stylish lady, I can wine and dine you, you will have a nice time, call or text me. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424781

MELINDA, 52yrs, attractive and broad minded seeking chap any age for some fun. Couples also. Text only Mailbox: 4131946

JACKIE, 56yrs, attractive lady who is lots of fun seeks like-minded gent for nights in, days out and much much more. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424491

CHRISTINE, 40, attractive slim sporty brunette seeks fit well built male. Call me let's see what the future brings. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 425061

KATIE 35yrs, slender well educated brunette seeks no strings mutual pleasure with gent 40+. Must be discreet, married or single. ACA. Tel: 0906 515 3005 Box 419673

LOUISE, 29, curvy red haired female, bean but in the past seeks male to buy her flowers and mend her broken heart. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 425041

JANE, young 41, very broadminded seeks chap any age for discreet no strings fun, any age, no time wasters ACA. Tel: 0906 515 3011 Box: 409715

LYN, 47, curvy quiet sensitive brunette but with a wild side. It could be exciting to know me! Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 425013

SOPHIA young 40yrs, married but bored, seeks discreet adult fun, any area, all calls answered. Tel: 0906 515 3019 Box: 413399

KAREN, 47, an attractive blue-eyed redhead, curvy size 16, likes films, football, pubs, reading, seeking like-minded male for nights in/out, hopefully more. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 425057

EMILY, mature well educated lady, blonde and smart and broadminded seeks gent any age for no strings fun. ACA. Tel: 0906 515 3023 Box 421375

JULIE attractive 35yr old female with a great body, looking for no strings attached evening meets. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 425037

DE GENTS, I'm Kelly, a down to earth lady, 35yrs, shapely brunette, seeking someone with GSOH, looks unimportant, any age. ACA. I promise! Tel: 0906 515 3027 Box 423035

SARAH, young looking curvy 41yr old female, bored with everyday routine, WLTm up for some fun discreet and extremely broadminded younger male. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424827

DEBBIE, 50, petite blonde looking for some fun and adventure with similar fun loving mature male. Looks unimportant. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424799

CALL or text me, I'm Claire, single, 41yrs loves life to the full, hoping you will contact me if you want a English gent to teach me some new steps, tall in love with, spoil, pamper and make feel very special. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424255

SARAH, mature feminine lady, kind caring but still has a sensual side, hoping to meet like minded, confident, not smoking gent with GSOH, looks unimportant. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424777

ANDREA, 43, slim with long dark hair, blue eyes, loves to dance seeks romantic man to share intimate moments in or out. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424747

PROFESSIONAL lady, mid 60s, interesting, mature, caring, theatre, walking, days out and travelling, animal lover, looking for a professional gentleman, kind and caring, intellectual and outgoing, with gosh, for friendship possibly more, in the Stafford area. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424569

Hi I'm Ellie, 39, pretty, funny, great figure, OH/Chid, have everything apart from a WLTm someone I wanna be with, not have to be. Call me. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424635

DIVORCED female, attractive, sensual by nature, OH/AC, bored with own company, looking to make life a little more exciting with likeminded man. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424591

PATRICIA, 50s, solvent female, tactile, fun, likes to travel, seeks tall, easygoing mature male to enjoy all the good things in life with. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424553

BARBARA, 36, slim blonde, likes music, sport, the outdoors, quiet nights in etc. WLTm kind honest gent to share interests and get to know me. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424549

HEATHER, 48, well travelled solvent brunette looking to share a large glass of wine and whatever follows with affectionate man friend. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424429

JOSIE, sexy black lady, 52yrs seeks adult times with concerning gent, any age, discreet clean, womanly figure. Text only Mailbox: 4028592

CAROL, mid 50s lady, young at heart, attractive and sexy (so I'm told) Give me a call if you are a gent with GSOH. ACA. Tel: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424783

IAN, 58s, medium build, OH/AC, late 50s, likes most things, holidays, gardening, motorbikes, WLTm similar aged lady, 50-60, with a nice personality. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 421345

ANABELLE, sophisticated 28yrs hoping to meet older gent for adult fun, discreet, sincere, genuine advertiser. Text only Mailbox: 4157105

DONNA, 42, bright bubbly blue eyed blonde looking for someone to enjoy life and love to the full with. Call me. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424873

MARY, professional mature lady, loves life, very sociable and fun, seeks gent for good conversation and happy times. All calls and texts answered. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424775

SUE, attractive genuine lady, own home, loves to spoil a man, give me a call or text. ACA. Tel: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424673

RETIRE happy, caring, attractive female, likes gardening, travel, animals, comedy, seeks tall, funny, kind chap, Shropshire. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 411459

SUZANNA, 45, lonely beautiful classy French lady looking for happy decent reliable very sexy man for lots of TLC and good times. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424847

TERRI, attractive young looking 29yrs, long legged sporty seeking nice man to fall in love with, up to 45yrs. If that's you pls call, you have nothing to lose. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424377

SUSAN, 43, pretty green eyed brunette looking for an interesting attractive man who would understand my wicked sense of humour. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424381

JOY attractive Asian female 37, loves to dance, looking for older English gent to teach me some new steps, tall in love with, spoil, pamper and make feel very special. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424255

FEMALE 50, seeks male of similar age for friendship, possible relationship. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 350529

HELEN, mid 50's naughty lady seeks some fun times with gent any age. ACA. Tel: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424493

ANGELA, 48yrs, seeks male companion for nights in, dining, theatre, more. ACA or text me. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424495

JULIE, 53yrs, tall, slim, dark haired lady, sociable and fun loving, new to the area so WLTm men friends for fun, maybe more. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424497

SEXY brunette 39, petite, brown eyes, seeks energetic discreet guy for no strings fun and friendship. Ageless! unimportant. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424451

MALE, 63, caring, easygoing, N/S seeks female 50-70 for friendship and romance. Looks unimportant. Likes occasional drink, eating in/out, cinema and driving. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418893

CHRISTIAN male, 51, seeking Christian female, 35-45 for friendship, possibly more. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 423747

MATURE male, 50, medium-build, varied interests, seeks true Christian female, 35-45, who enjoys evenings in and dining out, for friendship or possibly more. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419283

ANY mature women over 60 seeking adult fun - this attractive male 58 will cater for your needs, any size or status. Text only. Mailbox: 5410860

MALE, 59, 5'12, dark hair, looking for a lady, 50-60, to share the good things in life. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424759

ITALIAN male, 46, from Oldbury, seeking female, 30-50, for friendship, possible relationship. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424371

IAN, 58s, medium build, OH/AC, late 50s, likes most things, holidays, gardening, motorbikes, WLTm similar aged lady, 50-60, with a nice personality. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 421345

BIG is beautiful is larger is lovelier, Steve 58, seeking broadminded, adventurous BBW for fun times. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 412031

TOM, 32, slim, attractive, own home, likes to eat out and in, WLTm honest, kind girl for tender, loving care and fun times. No time wasters please. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424929

MALE, 64, single, n/s, likes music, films, driving, nights in, dining out, trips, WLTm lady, 50-70, looks unimportant, for friendship and relationship. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424927

CARING male, 55, N/S, medium build, likes meals out, music, cinema, sports, driving, seeks female, 40-60 for friendship. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 239148

HONEST male, 60s, N/S, GSOH, car owner, seeks female, 55-70 for friendship, maybe more. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 416817

BLACK male, ex-marine, 6ft11, would like to meet a lady, 30 or over, if you would like a night in or out, Birmingham area, give me a shout. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424507

ADVENTUROUS 36-year-old male, slim, dark hair, likes music, cycling and photography, seeks female for friendship, maybe more. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 417235

GENT 48, youthful outlook, likes countryside, keep fit, karaoke, seeks female for fun times. N Shropshire. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 408411

IAN, GSOH, 60, looking for somebody to go out with and have a good time, a good laugh, maybe things will move on, I'm young at heart so looking for younger female if possible. NSA. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424357

RETIRE male seeking companion-ship maybe more. No time wasters. Text only Mailbox: 5524315

TIM, young at heart, intelligent, fun loving, looking for a lady, 30-45, a lady with a GSOH, for friendship and possibly more. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424395

ATTRACTIVE, Tall and intelligent Black male 50, lover of animals and nature seeks solvent lady of quality 50+ for romance. Text only Mailbox: 5561456

SEAN mixed race 44, seeks female, looks unimportant. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 392363

37 year old guy, 5'7, dark hair, blue eyes, likes DVDs, nights in and out, seeks female, 42-49, in Leamington Spa/Rugby area, for friendship and long term relationship. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424325

ANDY, single, 53, looking for a mature, sexy lady, age/looks unimportant, for fun and adventure. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424893

MALE, mid 60s, honest person, lots of interests, looking for a lady, 45-55, to share the good times with. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424321

NICE old-fashioned gent, seeks kind, caring romantic lady for LTR. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 416905

WIDOWER, 60s, GSOH, n/s, likes places of interest, country walks, cats and dogs, music, theatre and cinema, still looking for a lady, around 55, for companionship. ACA. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424709

MALE, 59, 5'12, looking for genuine lady, 50-55, to share the good things in life. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424353

ATTRACTIVE, tall, dark, professional male, 50, GSOH, easygoing, enjoys sport, socialising, good company, looking to meet attractive female for fun, adventure and take things from there. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424563

YOUNG 70 widower, fit, lonely, 5'11, 11st, likes drives, walks, DIY, meals out, gardening, smoker, looking for lady to spend life with. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424687

59YR old male, likes country walks, pub lunches, seeks lady for friendship, maybe more. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424685

MALE 50 seeks mature, home loving lady, 60 plus who enjoys cosy nights in. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424683

MARTIN trustworthy, warm hearted, loving, reliable male, 45, fit, medium build, young at heart, GSOH, seeks female, 50-60 for friendship, maybe more. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424681

MARK 48, slim, fit, GSOH, looking for loyal partner for LTR. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424679

CARING 55yr old male, widower, 6ft 3ins, WLTm lady, 40-55 for fun and laughter, maybe happy ever after. Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 424677

MALE 57, attractive, seeks mature woman any age for close fun, married or single. Text only Mailbox: 5410860

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A CLASS CARPET & UPHOLSTERY CLEANING
OAP discount. Recession Prices. Unbeatable Value: Rooms cleaned from £10
Call Paul 07870 341089

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CLASSIFIEDS HELPED ME...

"I am really pleased with the response I get from my Classified Advertising!"

Paul Westwood

FOR GREAT BUSINESS RESULTS CALL
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building supplies

QUALITY DOORS AND HARDWOOD FLOORING @ low prices. Call Arnold Laver 0121 533 5428.

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OAP discount. Recession Prices. Unbeatable Value: Rooms cleaned from £10
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roofing

MG ROOFING Flat roofs, tiling, roof repairs, fascias and gutters. Call 01902 238989 / 07580 465449.

SEMI RETIRED ROOFER
Ridge Tiles Rebedded, flat roofing, no job to small
40 years experience.
Keith: 07546 158165

skip hire

MT SKIPS & GRAB HIRE
Save \$\$\$
All size skips and all areas covered
Some day delivery faster than a phone call!!!
Open 7 days a week
07920 88 57 74 or 01384 24 09 56

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GRINSELLS SKIP HIRE

CLASSIFIEDS HELPED ME...

CLASSIFIEDS HELPED ME...

Thanks to our Classified advertising in the Express & Star we are really busy!

It definitely works for us!

Grinsells Skip Hire.

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SAM

Nine year old neutered male Jack Russell cross Collie, he is the size of a Jack Russell but with a coat of a Collie, he is a easy going lad, who is full of character, he is good around children and other dogs, he loves a fuss and his walks, he is in perfect health and is fully vaccinated, in a foster home at the moment.

01588 676106.
www.dogsamaritans.org.uk

NOTICE TO READERS
Please be aware that when purchasing a puppy there are some simple guidelines you can follow to ensure that you are not purchasing from a Puppy Farmer:

1. Try to ensure you visit the puppy whilst it is with its Mother.

2. Do not arrange to collect a puppy from any other location than that of the breeder.

3. Ensure that you are given any KC documentation, if pedigree. Whilst Midland News Association publications take great care to avoid publication of advertisements from Puppy Farmers we cannot accept any liability should readers purchase from this kind of establishment.

vets

Express & Star

THIS SPACE COULD BE PROMOTING YOUR BUSINESS

Every day our customers get a great response from Classified Advertising.

So could you by calling our friendly experienced Sales Advisors on 01902 319191.

5 Business & Farming

business opportunities

READERS are recommended to take appropriate professional advice before entering any obligations.

businesses for sale

BUSINESS FOR SALE coffee house / tea rooms, Sedgley. £6,000 ono. 07742 587180 / 07792 348360.

6 Property

overseas property

NOTICE TO READERS
Readers are advised to seek independent legal advice before entering into any financial commitments.

pets corner

KIND HOMES WANTED
CJ - Small terrier black and white, broken coated, 18 months.

JOEY - small, shy tri colour Border Collie, 18 months old needs some TLC

KIA - 18 months old small tri colour girl, very timid

SADIE - pretty 2 year old small Border Collie, sweet, ideal pet.

ELSA - 4 year old, sandy coloured cross breed, medium size.

MOSS - 1 year old, Border Collie, good natured, friendly.
01588 676106.
www.dogsamaritans.org.uk

properties wanted

Need to sell your home fast?
We can help you make a fresh start

Purchase Agreed Within 7 DAYS

ALL CIRCUMSTANCES CONSIDERED
COMPLETE ON DATE TO SUIT
FREE VALUATION AND LEGALS
FREE FRIENDLY ADVICE
LOCAL COMPANY

MARION | PROPERTY SOLUTIONS
WHY NOT CALL US TODAY
for an informal, friendly and confidential chat?
0121 405 0797 *Terms and Conditions apply
OUR LINES ARE OPEN 24/7

Home Cash Buyer
Sell today, sign today, complete when u wish
£££ RENT BACK OPTIONS £££
Houses / Land Required
Ring Paul 24/7 Local **07870 341 089**
Sandwell area: Call 0121 696 4154
Walsall & Cannock area: Call 01922 432049
Wolverhampton: Call 01902 489901
www.homecashbuyer.co.uk

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CLASSIFIEDS HELPED ME...

We have been advertising in the Express & Star and Chronicles for over 20 years and consider it a key part of our business with the regular flow of calls, which our advertising generates.

Black Country Homes

FOR GREAT BUSINESS RESULTS CALL **01902 319 191** Brought to you by Express & Star

ClassifiedAds BUY LOCAL, SELL LOCAL

CLASSIFIEDS HELPED ME...

"I am really pleased with the response I get from my Classified Advertising!"
Paul Westwood - Home Cash Buyer

FOR GREAT BUSINESS RESULTS CALL **01902 319 191** Brought to you by Express & Star

accommodation to let

NOTICE TO READERS It is an offence under the Accommodation Agencies Act 1953, for an Agency to charge a fee simply for the registration of your requirements and/or supplying particulars of premises to let.

SMART ROOMS in shared house. Netherton, from £85 pwk. Single, £95 pwk. DBL inc bills. No DSS. 07970 717139 or 07940 116130.

THREE BED end terrace, available now, garage, Ashmore Park, DSS welcome. One month's rent one month's deposit in advance. Ref req. £550pcm. 0121 296 9866.

mobile homes

MUST BE SEEN

OMAR FULLY RESIDENTIAL PARKHOME
Double unit, 38 x 20, 2 bedrooms, private parking, situated in Penkridge.
Contact for full details.
07810 044813 or 07801 530894.

part time - general

GRANGE HILL HOUSE CARE HOME
516 Bromsgrove Road, Halesowen, B62 0JJ

PART TIME COOK
Required to cater for 38 residents - all preparation carried out by Kitchen Assistants. Good hourly pay

Enquiries during office hours only 0121 550 1312

SELL IT FAST SELL IT LOCAL
01902 317878

ClassifiedAds

8 Motoring

NISSAN ALMERA PULSE
53 reg. MoT till next September, nice condition for year.
Needs timing chain.
Offers.
07434 451211.

MUST BE SEEN

NISSAN MICRA 1.0.
S reg. 1 owner last 12 years.
5 months MoT.
Very clean.
£275. o.n.o.
Telephone 01902 738257.

cars under £1500

ADVERTISERS ARE REMINDED
that the Business Advertisements (Disclosure) Order of 1977 requires that advertisements must clearly differentiate between Private and Trade.

IDEAL FIRST CAR
CHEVROLET MATIZ 1.0
2008.
53,000 miles.
Excellent condition.
Silver.
MoT June 17.
Lovely car.
£1095 ono.
07426 410329.

BARGAIN
PEUGEOT 206 COUPE
02 plate, MoT till April 2017, blue, 39,401 miles,
good condition / runner.
£550 ono.
07475 569077.

FIAT PUNTO
ACTIVE SPORT 1200CC
05 Reg, 80,000 miles, MoT till April 2017. Black, very reliable.
£695 ono
07500 753663

REDAULT CLIO DIESEL
52, blue, electric windows, long MoT, pas, diesel, 5 door
£500.
07879 403302.

EXCELLENT CONDITION
RENAULT MEGANE 1.4 PETROL
2008.
5 door. Hatchback.
Grey Metallic.
New timing belt and fuel pump.
Recent service.
MoT March 2017.
£1,100 ono.
01902 822946.

FIAT DOBLO HIGHTOP
55, blue, abs, long MoT, central locking, pas, diesel, dissable ramp
£899.
07879 403302.

FIAT PANDA 06 reg, full MoT, very good condition, excellent runner. £850 ono. 07810 590427.

FIAT PUNTO 1.2 ACTIVE SPORT
2003 reg, 52,000 miles.
MoT July 2017, EW, PAS, CL, very reliable, good condition.
Yellow, good heater, spare tyres, 2 keys.
Some service history.
£375 ono
07956 615584.

BARGAIN
HYUNDAI GETZ
1.3 GSi
52 plate, 12 months MoT.
Tinted back windows.
Colour red.
Good brakes and tyres.
£600 ono.
01902 843730 after 2pm.

RENAULT MEGANE OASIS 1.6 PETROL
2005, 3dr, grey, 72,000 miles, full MoT, 2 key cards.
£1,000 ono
07894 411935.

BARGAIN
ROVER 1.6 SLI
1997, blue metallic, hatchback, 36,473 genuine miles.
MoT Sep 2017.
In very good condition.
One lady owner.
£425 ono
SOLD.

BARGAIN
ROVER 75 CONNOSEUR
FSH,
48,205 miles,
one owner.
£500.
SOLD.

EXCELLENT CONDITION
MERCEDES A150
55 reg.
5 door.
Two former keepers.
MoT May 2017.
Drives well.
Some service history.
£950 ono.
07939 797979.

MAZDA 6 TS2
2L petrol 2004, 78,000 miles, metallic silver 5-door hatchback, MoT 30 Apr 2017, FSH, one owner.
£695
07505 906553.

SUZUKI ALTO
2006, 41,000 miles, silver, electric windows, air bag, fsh, MoT, metallic paint, central locking, one owner, pas, stereo, CD.
£850.
07976 670022.

MUST BE SEEN
TOYOTA CARENA E 1.8 GS
1997, 103,000 genuine miles, MoT September 2017, service history, four new tyres, new clutch, electric front windows, sunroof, radio/CD player, excellent condition, lovely car.
£595 o.n.o.
07891 775897.

BARGAIN
VAUXHALL CORSA 1.2
5 Door.
04 Reg.
23,000 miles.
12 months MoT.
E/W. CD. E/M.
£995 ono.
0777 9455916.

1ST TO SEE WILL BUY
VAUXHALL CORSA
1200, 03 plate, 3-dr.
Full MoT, green.
Very clean inside and out.
Very reliable.
£525 ono.
01902 862610.

EXCELLENT CONDITION
VAUXHALL CORSA C 1.2
54 plate
73,000 miles
A1 condition
11 months MoT
blue.
£1,275.
07970 174138.

cars over £1500

7 SEATER
CITROEN C8 SX HDI
Automatic MPV, 2006/06, Mot August 2017, air con, stereo, electric sliding doors, grey, adjustable luggage rack, good runner,
£1,595/
07546 779139.

CITROEN DISPATCH HDI
59 plate, silver, 32,305 miles, 9 months MoT, 9 seater, very good condition.
£6,995 plus vat
01588 650646.

FORD FIESTA ZETEC
2013, 17,000 miles, black, abs, electric windows, air bag, air con, MoT, Bluetooth.
£5,200.
07989 212893.

HONDA JAZZ 2009, 51,000 Miles, Blue, MoT, Mint Condition, 1 Previous Owner, Service History, New Car Forces Sale £3,750 07748304733

SUPERB CONDITION
PEUGEOT 2008 SUV FELINE CALMA E HDI 1.6
2014 model, Sat Nav, parking sensors, cruise, electric roof, dual climate, fsh, factory Warranty, immaculate.
£8,750 ono.
Telephone 07715 021455.

9 Local Information

public & legal notices

LEGAL / PUBLIC NOTICES
For convenience you may fax any advertising requirements to
Marie Hogg on 01902 713146
or email **marie.hogg@expressandstar.co.uk**
(remember to include a name/contact number for confirmation of receipt)

ATTRACTIVE MALE 37
If you are looking for a genuine, honest, caring male who is fun to be around, then look no further!
I enjoy cross country biking, bowling, cinema, meals out, walks, holidays etc new to Bushbury area and would like to meet a like minded mature lady aged 29 to 44 years for friendship hopefully leading to relationship.
Genuine replies only. Photo appreciated (returned).
Box Number C20632, Express and Star, Queen Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES.

10 Personals

GENUINE ATTRACTIVE SLIM MAN 53
GSOH, car owner, would like to meet genuine lady 40-58 for evenings, days out and friendship.
Box Number P20637, Express and Star, Queen Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES.

GENUINE LADY
Car owner would like to meet genuine ladies age 65 to 80 years for nights/days out, holidays and for friendship.
Bloxwich, Willenhall, Wednesfield and Wolverhampton area.
Box Number P20642, Express and Star, Queen Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES.

general

HAVE YOU CHECKED your advertisement today? We would respectfully remind advertisers that it is their responsibility to inform the publishers of any mistakes or inaccuracies on the first day of publication.

personal

ANGELS
The largest adult superstore in the Midlands
• Adult Toys • Sexy Lingerie • Cosplay New Open
Unit 3 Frederick Street, Walsall, Walsall, CV1 2JL
01922 635544

STRAIGHT LADY 64
Kiddeminstre area.
Young outlook, seeks similar easy going, reliable lady for friendship, outings, dining out, short breaks, walks etc.
Must love animals and Dorset.
Car owner essential.
Box Number P20643, Express and Star, Queen Street, Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES.

AT MANYANA Gentlemen's Club, 5* customer rated Mon-Fri 10-9pm. Sat-Sun: 10-11pm. 0121 472 7281.

BOOK YOUR ADVERTISEMENTS OR FAMILY ANNOUNCEMENTS ONLINE AT
bookanad.
expressandstar.co.uk

and become one of hundreds of customers who regularly receive exclusive special offers & discounts.

ClassifiedAds

Landlords adapting to changes in UK



Private rented sector landlords in the UK are adapting to changes brought on by the Government but rents are set to rise as a result, a new analysis report suggests.

Buy to let landlords have seen changes to stamp duty which means now paying an extra 3%, have to carry out immigration checks on new tenants, face tougher lending conditions in the New Year and then tax changes in April 2017.

But the research report from Kent Reliance suggests that landlord confidence has bounced back following the Government intervention as they look to continue investing in the sector.

It says that landlords' confidence is at its highest in a year, with 54% of investors confident over the prospects for their portfolios, a recovery from the 39% recorded in the second quarter of the year, according to the survey of 900 property investors run in association with BDRIC Continental.

It also reveals that property investors have taken action to mitigate the additional tax costs they will face when tax relief is lowered on mortgage interest payments for individuals. This has seen landlords increasingly turn towards incorporation and borrowing through a limited company structure where finance costs can still be offset against rental income.

Indeed, Kent Reliance's analysis shows that there have already been more than 100,000 limited company loans issued in the first nine months of the year, double the total amount in the whole of 2015 and over 12,000 a month in the last quarter.

The report suggests that demand for this type of arrangement is likely to intensify as the tax changes bite. And 11% of landlords state they have already incorporated, or have moved holdings to a lower rate tax paying

spouse or partner to limit their tax exposure, while a further 25% are considering doing so with this alone accounting for over half a million landlords nationwide making the move. Kent Reliance estimates limited company lending in 2016 could total 143,000 for the year as a whole, rising to 163,000 in 2017.

However, the forthcoming tax changes are set to drive up rents. The report says that the average rent has hit a record high of £881 per month, despite the supply of rental property homes hitting an 18 month high in the period, a knock on effect of the rush to beat the stamp duty hike. Annual rental inflation slowed a little in the last quarter, but even so, rents still rose by 2.4%. With a growing tenant population, and rising rents, landlords in total are now collecting approximately £4.6 billion in rent each month.

The survey found that a third of landlords expected to increase rents in the next six months alone, by an average of 5.4%, equivalent £571 per year for households.

Two thirds cite higher future taxes and 43% the strength of tenant demand. Indeed, twice as many landlords are seeing an increase in tenant demand as the number seeing a decline. The recent budget announcement to ban letting fees, while providing a welcome reduction in tenants' upfront costs, will see any additional costs for landlords factored into rents, the report adds.

It points out that extra pressure will also come from the Prudential Regulation Authority's new underwriting standards, due for implementation next year which will see landlords needing to demonstrate higher yields to secure finance, unless they can provide larger deposits. As a result, Kent Reliance forecasts that rents will rise by an average of 3% in 2017.

"The stamp duty levy clearly took its toll on the market, and combined

with the forthcoming tax changes, landlords have felt at the mercy of a political agenda. But confidence is returning as landlords take action to limit the damage to their finances. The use of limited companies is soaring, and rents are increasing, even after one of the biggest surges in rental supply in recent history," said Andy Golding, chief executive of OneSavings Bank which trades under the Kent Reliance and InterBay brands in the buy to let sector.

"There is still more to come for the buy to let sector next year. The PRA's new underwriting standards are due to be implemented, the tax changes begin to take effect, and there is yet more potential intervention in the form of the Bank of England Financial Policy Committee's new powers. If the cumulative effect of constant change undermines the expansion of rental properties, this will simply exacerbate the housing crisis," he explained.

"The raft of recent measures aimed at the buy to let sector singularly sought to increase home ownership levels. Ironically, they will achieve the opposite, with even greater upward pressure on rents combined with the prospect of declining real incomes likely to stretch affordability even further," he pointed out.

"We have warned all along that the tax changes will push up rents, and this is already starting to happen. The ban on often unjustifiably high letting fees is well intentioned. However, it also means landlords could pass higher costs onto tenants, doing little to bring down the overall cost of renting," he added.

"Only through a substantive and long term building programme across all tenures will we see an end to escalating house prices and rents.

"The Chancellor has moved to provide more support for house building, but it is not yet enough to see the step change in supply that we need."

Hicks Hadley

hickshadley.com
0121 585 6667

Halesowen Office Lettings & Property Management



HALESOWEN, Springfield Road£1,450 pcm+Fees
A unique extended detached residence in this very convenient location. This lovely property has 3 reception rooms, large kitchen/dining area with breakfast bar, downstairs w.c., 5 double bedrooms (2 with French doors leading to balcony overlooking garden, beautiful bathroom with separate shower, large rear garden, driveway and double garage. Also features: CCTV, full fire-alarm system, bathroom with sauna/steam room & Jacuzzi bath. EPC: TBC



KIDDERMINSTER, Grosvenor Avenue£795 pcm+Fees
Shining 3 story semi detached town house in a quiet cul-de-sac position within walking distance of Kidderminster train station. Completely refurbished to a very high standard. Front reception room, lounge with feature fireplace with wood-burner, modern fitted kitchen with appliances. Three large double bedrooms, beautiful bathroom with separate shower cubicle and a roll edged clawed foot free standing bath. Not to be missed. EPC: E



HALESOWEN, Inkberrow Road£750 pcm+Fees
A 3/4 bedroom town house located in central Halesowen on the popular Huntlands estate comprising of: modern fitted kitchen, large living room, 3 double bedrooms plus bedroom 4/study, gas central heating, double glazed throughout, bathroom with shower, driveway for 3/4 vehicles, garage, private rear garden. Not to be missed! EPC: D



STOURBRIDGE, Baylie Street£725 pcm+Fees
Stunning mid terrace period property located in the sought after Stourbridge Old Quarter. This house has been finished to an exceptional standard and offers reception hall, generous through lounge, impressive kitchen with integrated appliances, utility room, guest w.c., two double bedrooms, superb bathroom with roll top bath and separate shower and good size loft room. Also features a courtyard garden and gas central heating and majority double glazed. EPC: D



STOURBRIDGE, Renfrew Close£695 pcm+Fees
Sited on a sought after estate. This lovely 3 bed semi detached house features a large reception room, fitted kitchen with a washing machine and dishwasher, 2 double bedrooms and 1 single bedroom, house bathroom with shower, front and rear gardens, 2 car driveway and garage. EPC: D



BRIERLEY HILL, Walker Avenue£675 pcm+Fees
UNDERGOING A REFURBISHMENT! A modern semi-detached house offering spacious family, accommodation comprising of: entrance hallway, large lounge, fitted kitchen, 3 good sized bedrooms, new bathroom with shower, driveway parking & garage. EPC: TBC



STOURBRIDGE, Ryder Street£650 pcm+Fees
Semi-detached and spacious 2 bedroom traditional house in this very popular location close to all transport links and King George V park. Featuring entrance hallway, lounge, kitchen with appliances/dining area, conservatory, rear garden, 2 good size bedrooms, family bathroom, driveway for 3 cars. EPC: TBC



CRADLEY HEATH, Wrights Lane£650 pcm+Fees
Modern spacious semi detached home in this very popular residential area. This lovely property comprises of entrance hall, fitted kitchen, large lounge with patio doors leading to a conservatory, 3 good sized bedrooms (master en-suite), family bathroom, integral garage, driveway. EPC: C



HALESOWEN, Blackberry Lane£625 pcm+Fees
Not to be missed! A lovely mid terrace in a very popular location close to Town Centre having been newly painted & new carpets upstairs comprising of: Lounge, fitted dining kitchen with appliances, 2 bedrooms & a further carpeted left room accessed by strong & sturdy wooden ladders, refitted bathroom, central heating & double glazing, private rear garden with storage shed, on road parking, available now. EPC: D



HALESOWEN, Cobham Road£595 pcm+Fees
Well presented 2 double bedroom mid terrace house situated in this popular residential location being in walking distance of Halesowen Town Centre. This property benefits from 2 reception rooms, 1 with dining area & patio doors leading to rear garden, kitchen, downstairs bathroom with shower, 2 double bedrooms, double glazing and gas central heating. EPC: E



HAGLEY, Newlands Close £595 pcm+Fees
A superb modern ground floor apartment located near to Hagley Village & situated close to motorway links, open plan lounge/kitchen with appliances, double bedroom with fitted wardrobes and en-suite shower room & 1 large single bedroom, white bathroom suite, 1 allocated parking space, secure entry system. Not to be missed! EPC: C



CRADLEY HEATH, Elbow Street£450 pcm+Fees
A wonderfully furnished 1st floor flat within walking distance to old hill shops and train station. This property comprises of a light and airy living room, fitted kitchen with white goods, 1 double bedroom, and bathroom with shower. Benefits include electric storage heating, communal gardens, allocated parking. EPC: C



STOURBRIDGE, Stambermill House£425 pcm+Fees
Fully refurbished apartments within a stones throw of Stourbridge Town Centre and on the number 9 bus route. This stunning 1 bedroom apartment on the ground floor features an open plan lounge/fitted kitchen, shower room, 1 double bedroom & private rear parking. Not to be missed! EPC: C



BRIERLEY HILL, Norwood Road£425 pcm+Fees
An unfurnished and terraced house, close to local shops and not far from Merry Hill Shopping Centre. This large house features a lovely living room, fitted kitchen, downstairs bathroom with shower, 2 double bedrooms, gas central heating, double glazing, rear garden, on road parking. EPC: E



DUDLEY, Greystone Passage£375 pcm+Fees
1ST MONTHS RENT HALF PRICE! A recently redecorated 1st floor flat within walking distance to Dudley Town Centre. Featuring kitchen, 1 bedroom, bathroom with shower. Garden, off road parking. Unfurnished. This property must be seen and not missed. EPC: E



Looking forward to next generation

By Sharon Walters

It's a multi award-winner and you can see why. Nissan's Qashqai has more than proved itself as a capable family car since it first hit our roads almost 10 years ago and began our love of the crossover.

Back then it was quite a move for Nissan and one which several other manufacturers quickly followed. It led the way in the crossover segment creating the SUV Qashqai when the Japanese marque wanted to replace the Almera, its popular family hatchback. There were plenty of smallish 4x4s but with that came the added expense of getting that ability when the majority of buyers would rarely, if ever, need it. But at the same time families wanted something with a little more road presence than a hatch and also a feeling of safety created by a higher-riding, rugged looking car. And so came the Qashqai.

Now it could have been a bit of a disaster, producing a car from such a concept. But engineers at Nissan hit on success with their first ever attempt a decade ago and have not looked back since.

It is Nissan's most successful vehicle to date with over one million sales since launch and was the first model to be styled by Nissan Design Europe in London, with engineering development led by Nissan Technical Centre Europe (NTCE) in Cranfield, Bedfordshire. And built at the super efficient Nissan plant in Sunderland. Continued production in the UK was in doubt after Brexit but the company has now committed to the Sunderland plant for the next generation due late next year or early 2018, along with the X-Trail. All excellent for British car manufacturing.



State-of-the-art technology inside

And so to the car. First things first, handling may not be the sharpest but it does the job very well along with low noise levels both from wind and tyre rumble (especially on motorways) and good ride comfort. And the six-speed manual box is slick and responsive. Build quality is good and it is spacious enough for three passengers in the rear although headroom for those who break six foot many feel a little tight.

Technology is advanced with state-of-the-art features including a safety shield which provides eight different safety systems with around view monitor, blind spot warning, moving object detection and driver attention alert.

The around view monitor has four cameras that give you a 360-degree bird's-eye view around your Nissan Qashqai. Selectable split-screen close-ups of the front, rear, and side views help you avoid annoying parking bumps and scrapes.

NissanConnect apps (where would we be without them now!) give you easy access to your preferred social media and much more. Voice recognition means you can keep



NISSAN QASHQAI 1.6 DIG-T 163 TEKNA MANUAL, £25,930

Build quality is good and it is spacious enough for three passengers in the rear

your eyes on the road and your hands on the wheel. On top of that Nissan's Advanced Drive-Assist displays important turn-by-turn navigation to helpful driving aids, to audio track info, right in your eyeline enabling you to focus better on the road ahead.

There's a choice of four trim levels and two petrol and two diesel options. I tried out the

DIG-T 163 Tekna manual. This produces 163 bhp and returns (officially, although I did quite close to the figures) 47.1 mpg in a combined cycle.

Short and long journeys were comfortable with supportive seats and for the driver extra scope to get a good driving position with the electrically adjustable seat partnered

with manual lumbar support – a feature I am particularly keen to have to prevent that lower back pain you often get after lengthier journeys.

It's a stylish looking car, well equipped for the price tag with a high level of finish inside and out. I'm looking forward to experiencing the next generation.

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A top team – Netherton CC's hard-working committee with guests Jeremy Coney and Josh Daniels



Reg Cooper, aged 84, is recognised for his outstanding service with the club

Celebrations as cricket club racks up 150 years

NETHERTON CC honoured three club stalwarts as they rounded off their 150th anniversary celebrations with a night to remember.

Past and present players plus numerous guests checked into the Village Hotel in Dudley for a special dinner to mark the end of a momentous season.

Former New Zealand captain turned radio and TV pundit Jeremy Coney provided the cricketing entertainment with tales from his lengthy career while comedian Josh Daniels gave a brilliant stand-up routine.

Both were outdone, however, by the standing ovation club legend Reg Cooper received when his outstanding service was recognised.

The 84-year-old has served the club in numerous capacities for 53 years, having first joined as a player in 1963 and is still there at their Highbridge Road ground every Saturday during the season.

Emotional

Netherton president Dennis Lewis read out the tributes to Cooper and two other members who were honoured, Colin Brookes and Keith Culwick. Coney presented them gifts.

"The standing ovation Reg received was the highlight of the night for me," said Lewis.

"It was lovely and I think it was quite emotional for Reg. He is hugely popular at the club.

"He joined in 1963 as a player and he is still there every Saturday, making the opposition feel welcome and dishing out cups of tea.

"He played then sat on the committee for 30 years and also did a lot of work around the ground.

"He used to love cutting the outfield and took a lot of pride in his job. He designed the scoreboard

SPORTING FEATURE

By Nick Elwell

"It's been a very busy and enjoyable year. We had planned things out and everything has gone quite smoothly."

had built to mark our 125th anniversary and also the team room that we had built the same year.

"There isn't much he hasn't done during his time at the club and 53 years is a unbelievable amount of commitment."

Brookes is another hugely popular character at the club and well known across the Black Country and beyond for his time with Halesowen Town where he is the current president and a former manager.

The former professional footballer, who was a youth team player alongside the Busby Babes at Manchester United before spells with Albion and his home-town club Barnsley, is a keen cricket fan and joined Netherton in 1968.

"Colin had joined the police force after playing football and he was on the beat in Netherton when he joined," said Lewis.

"He played and captained the first team and has been a member ever since.

"He was a bit of a practical joker and likes to tell a few tales.

"He still comes down and bores us all with his stories!" joked Lewis. "But he has the club at heart."

Culwick joined Cooper and Brookes in the spot-

light as the club thanked him for excellent work as groundsman. "Keith joined 20 years ago when his lads Matt and Mark started playing junior cricket with us," said Lewis.

"Keith ended up coaching the junior side and then started doing some work on the ground and has been our groundsman for the last 16 years, working things around his day job.

"People like this are the heartbeat of the club. Without them you wouldn't survive. You wouldn't have a club."

Lewis has served the club since 1984. He turned up one day to watch his brother play and with the team one short, he took to the field and has been hooked ever since.

Alongside the club's hard-working committee, Lewis has overseen a successful series of events that have marked a special year.

Beer

"It's been a very busy and enjoyable year," he said. "We had planned things out and everything has gone quite smoothly."

"It started in May with the president's game. We have had lots of social events and a few beer matches along the way and then we had the game with MCC on May 31.

"It was a good game of cricket and a nice get-together in the club afterwards."

And after seeing the on-field exploits prove such a hit, alongside a season that saw the first team just miss out on promotion for the third successive year in Division Three of the Worcestershire County League, Lewis was delighted with the end-of-season gathering at The Village.

"The dinner at The Village was absolutely great," he added. "The feedback that we have received has been really good.

It was a great end to what has been a good season."



Jeremy Coney with Colin Brookes, who was honoured on the night



The MCC XI that played in the president's game to mark the milestone



New Zealander Jeremy Coney and Keith Culwick



The first XI of Netherton Cricket Club, which was founded in 1866



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Lifeline for Heathens in venue deal

CRADLEY co-promoter Gary Patchett has revealed how their future was "touch and go" after striking a deal to ride at both Wolverhampton and Birmingham in 2017.

The Heathens, who have been without a permanent home since the closure of their Dudley Wood base in 1995, will split their fixtures between Monmore Green and Perry Barr.

The move comes after an increase in meetings for Wolverhampton caused a reduced number of dates to be available for the Heathens. Patchett admits there was a time when they feared they may be unable to come to the tapes in 2017.

But he is delighted to have found a solution to remain in the National League. Patchett said: "It was touch and go at one point, but we've come up with a solution which suits everybody and we're pleased to be able to continue racing next year."

"There were doubts after the AGM, and we've been waiting on things in the other leagues to develop to allow us to know where we stand."

"We've got to thank Tony Mole for accommodating us at Birmingham again, because although it's not been without its issues we're grateful for their assistance."

"The format of the Premiership has changed meaning Wolverhampton need more Mondays available for extra fixtures."

"That has impacted upon the number of dates available for us, and whilst there are some available dates in between the Wolves fixtures there weren't enough to accommodate us full-time."

"We'd also like to assure fans that this uncertainty hasn't had an impact on team building, and our plans, whilst still dependent on the AGM, are already well under way."

Swimmers show their best form at national competition

HALESOWEN swimmers produced a host of personal bests at the the Welsh National Short Course Championships.

Thirteen Halesowen Swimming Club club made the trip to the Wales National Pool in Swansea for a weekend of competition. Each had qualified for the event to compete against some of the best swimmers in the UK including some Olympic Champions.

It was the largest group from the club to qualify for national competition—and every swimmer produced a personal best time.

Between them they made 23 finals in all, the best performances coming from Jack Simpson, who claimed a silver in the 100m freestyle and bronze in 50m event. Mark Laing took silver in 50m backstroke and Olivia Jay a bronze in 100m breaststroke, followed by the most outstanding performance of the weekend, a gold in the 50m breaststroke.

Other club representatives were Emma Bird, Emily Jay, Georgia Lees, Niamh Larkin, Emma Osborne, Holly Simpson, Ryan Larkin, Jakob Baker James Cuthbert and Robert Jennings.

Glassboys could face Chairboys in Cup

STOURBRIDGE could face League Two opposition in the FA Cup third round – should they get past Northampton in their rearranged second round tie.

Victory over the League One Cobblers would see Gary Hackett's men travel to Adams Park to face Wycombe Wanderers, setting up a tie between the Chairboys and the Glassboys.

Stourbridge will first have to overcome Northampton Town after last Sunday's clash was called off less than two hours before kick off because of a frozen pitch. It has been rearranged for next Tuesday, December 13. The decision put the

Football

Glassboys into the hat for the third round for the first time in their 144-year history. But Hackett said he was devastated at the postponement.

"It's such a big anti-climax," he said. "The excitement of it, full crowd, all the preparation, TV cameras and suddenly we're told the game's off. It's a real downer."

Stourbridge are the lowest-ranked team left in the competition and the club hopes the second round tie will now be selected for live TV coverage. Hackett played down criticism of referee

Andy Davies, saying: "The referee is there to make a decision, whether I agree or disagree. It was a hard pitch."

"Ten or 15 years ago it would have been played but with the PC brigade of today you're not allowed to risk it."

"I understand why he's made the decision."

"It was maybe a bit late, who knows? In hindsight he should have maybe got here earlier but it's a tough job to do, being a referee, so I don't think we should be pointing fingers anywhere."

On Tuesday night, Stourbridge beat Sutton Coldfield 4-2 on penalties in the first round of the Integro League Cup at Dales lane.

Bad break sees Whiley missing out

INJURY has ruled wheelchair tennis ace Jordanne Whiley out of the first grand slam of the new season, the Australian Open.

The world No.5 player from Halesowen suffered a wrist injury, forcing her out of the NEC Masters, and an X-ray revealed a fracture. She announced her withdrawal following a straight sets defeat to Aniek van Koot of the Netherlands in the first group game at the Olympic Park.

"My arm is in plaster," said Whiley. "I have been told that I will be unable to play tennis for six to eight weeks. I will therefore not be able to play in the first Grand Slam of 2017, the Australian Open."

The injury has brought to a premature end a year that saw Whiley win two further Grand Slam titles at Roland Garros and Wimbledon as well as a bronze medal at the Rio Paralympic Games, with her doubles partner Lucy Shuker. "I look forward to getting back on court, stronger and fitter, in 2017," she said.

Meanwhile, Whiley was this week appearing on the long-running BBC TV quiz show A Question of Sport.

The Paralympian, who has also received an MBE, joined host Sue Barker and regular team captains Matt Dawson and Phil Tufnell on the show last night (Wednesday). It will be repeated at 7.30pm tomorrow (Friday).

Appearing alongside her are sprinter Harry Aikines-Aryeetey, Olympic bronze medal-winning judoka Sally Conway and goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer.

Elementary for hosts as Sherlock nets two

Marine 0 Halesowen Town 4

HALESOWEN lost their second league game in a row, allowing the Merseysiders to leapfrog them in the Evo-Stik Premier Division table.

The home side took the lead after just six minutes when Warren Bellow's cross was not dealt with by Aaron Griffiths and Kurt Sherlock finished from 15 yards. The lead was doubled five minutes before the break, Danny Mitchley broke into the area and slipped the ball home past debutant goalkeeper John Bateman.

It was three just two minutes before the break when James Short created space on the left and Michael Monaghan put a header past Bateman from six yards.

It was all over on 83 minutes when Sherlock burst into the Halesowen area only to be felled by substitute James Hancock. Sherlock scored from the spot to cap a fine performance.

★★★

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LATE PENALTIES PROVE DECISIVE

Old Halesonians 20 Broadstreet 24

HALES prepared well for this game, but were ultimately unable to get the better of a third-placed Broadstreet.

Early pressure came from the visitors and after only three minutes Hales were penalised under pressure as Broadstreet converted. Two tries, one converted, extended the lead to 15-0.

Hales made some changes with Joe Collingham on at flanker and Matt Probert on at tight head prop and they came back into the game with fly half Chris Hooper kicking a penalty to reduce the deficit.

Hooper added the extras when Joe Collingham touched down, and when Neil Mason's try was converted, Hales led 17-15 at half-time.

From the start of the second half Broadstreet came back again and forced another penalty to edge back in front, but the lead changed hands again when Carl Robinson was tackled illegally and Hooper kicked the penalty.

Shortly after, Hooper left the field with a yellow card, putting pressure on the home 14. Broadstreet capitalised and with 10 minutes to go they forced two penalties to regain the lead.

Hales travel to Derby (kick off 2.15) on Saturday.

Broadstreet 2nds 32 Old Halesonians 2nds 24 OLD Hales, looking to improve their league position, soon found themselves 5-0 down, but captain Rob Butler drew them level.

Old Hales had a few bright spells in the first half. However, the home side put together some good attacking moves that resulted in two more tries and a penalty in the first half.

The team talk at half time seemed to do the trick and Old Hales came out for the second half with more determination. Dave Hunt went over, converted by Andy Tromans, followed by a try from No.8 Matt Masters, again converted. It was 24-22 to Hales when James Worton went over.

But Old Hales play was disrupted with Masters and Jack Linehan leaving the field injured. Broadstreet capitalised and a converted try put them back in front. And they sealed victory with a long-range penalty. On Saturday Old Hales face a tough league encounter against Derby away.

The third XV enjoyed a 32-26 win over DK Wasps.

Youngsters give rugby a try



Halesowen College sports students who organised the tag rugby tournament

MORE than 100 primary school children took part in a tag rugby tournament.

The contest was hosted by Halesowen College and five primary schools, but organised by sports students.

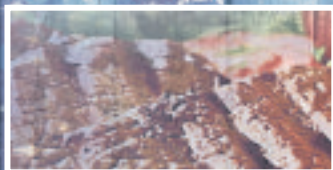
They planned the event as part of their studies and contacted St Kenelms, Clent, Blakedown, Belbroughton and Hagley Primary Schools to take part.

The youngsters designed posters which were

displayed in the primary schools and planned the running order and certificates for taking part.

Katy Skinner, sports lecturer at Halesowen College, said: "We had a great day and all the primary school children really enjoyed themselves and improved their fitness by taking part in the tournament."

"Our students worked really well as a team and we were all very proud."



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